NOVELS AND IDEAS: CONCEPTIONS OF AGENCY IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY FICTION

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Abstract

"Novels and Ideas" examines the representation of moral agency in Victorian fiction. A major strain of criticism portrays the investment in ethics in Victorian fiction as a way to avoid more serious political issues, creating a separate discourse that emphasizes the particular and emotional over the general and the rational. Recently, however, critics have seen a more complex dynamic, identifying the way literary texts develop their own accounts of traditionally philosophical topics like reflective awareness and moral psychology. Noting what Stefan Collini has called the "unreflective Kantianism" of Victorian ethics, "Novels and Ideas" continues this avenue of research, arguing that Victorian writers depict a sophisticated relationship between reason and emotion in moral deliberation. George Eliot shows how sympathy refigures the key commitments of Kantian respect in affective terms: in her novels, sympathy responds to the value of personhood as such. Charles Dickens's contrast between admirably bland protagonists and eccentric minor characters reformulates the tension between obligations that stem from mere humanity and those that stem from a concrete identity. George Meredith's analysis of egoism challenges the assumption of self-controlled selfishness in utilitarian psychology, suggesting that the egoist manifests an inability to carry out long-term projects and thus a breakdown in rational agency. Finally, Anthony Trollope challenges the assumption that rationality consists in deliberative judgment, suggesting that emotions can be more responsive to reasons than conscious thought.

Alongside these readings, the project reflects on what it means to read so openly for the ideas in what are, admittedly, artistic texts. Through an analysis of the arguments that support the "anti-cognitivist" belief that art does not make assertions, the project develops an approach that emphasizes reading for the content. Since reading for the intellectual content involves bringing texts from the past into conversation with current debates, the

project additionally defends interpretive anachronism, advocating a modified "presentism" that combines rational and historical reconstruction. It concludes by turning to philosophical aesthetics, arguing that the compelling ideas within a text can give it literary value.

Acknowledgments

Although I've been interested in the philosophy in literature essentially since high school, the nature of this project—what its core argument really was, and how its various pieces would fit together—didn't become entirely clear to me until a meeting with Amanda Anderson during my fifth year at Hopkins, when I'd already been working on it for some time. After having perused another of the interminable drafts of my George Eliot chapter, Amanda told me—with what I suspected was a hint of exasperation—that I was reading Eliot as if she was just saying the things I read her as saying. As Amanda put it then, I was making a sort of "category error," dismissing the fact that *Middlemarch* was, after all, a work of fiction. That, it occurred to me, was really the central problem I needed to address—why I wasn't making a category error, or if I was, why that sort of error could be justified as literary criticism. From that conversation came the core of "In Defense of Paraphrase," the introductory piece that would eventually determine the broader work. And that's appropriate, because Amanda's thought has been enormously important for my own. There's plenty of overt evidence of that in this dissertation, which engages her work directly in a number of places, but perhaps even more important was the silent influence she exerted as my director and primary interlocutor.

I don't remember what I said to Amanda at the time, but I'm sure that I wasn't appropriately cognizant of the importance of the problem in my response. To put the point delicately, an energetic commitment to my position has generally been the hallmark of my participation in intellectual discourse (rather less delicately: I'm awfully stubborn. Stubborn to the extent that my father brought it up in his toast at my wedding). And so let me say that I'm grateful to Amanda not only for her perceptive reading of my work, but for the patience with which she mentored me through this process. I know it wasn't always easy.

I also want to thank Jesse Rosenthal and Sharon Cameron for their hard work in helping me develop as a scholar. Jesse's efforts as a sounding-board for even my most desultory thinking were extremely helpful, and his extensive commentary on the Eliot chapter was instrumental for its final development. Although my direct engagement with Sharon's work diminished as the dissertation transformed from a transatlantic project into one solely concerned with Victorian novelists, I remain deeply influenced by the intense mixture of creativity and close analysis that characterizes both her scholarship and her teaching.

For their critical commentary, but more importantly for their friendship, I'm grateful to Matt Flaherty and Roger Maioli. Both have been extremely sympathetic readers, working to inhabit the methodology I was developing and helping me see how to extend it. I try to indicate in footnotes the many specific points where a conversation with them helped clarify my argument, but I'm sure I didn't get them all. And I'm grateful as well to Robert Day, Nick Bujak, and Doug Tye, whose conversations with me in and out of seminar over the last seven years have been an essential background to my work.

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Finally, I want to thank my wife and my family. I completed this project against the background of the disastrous job market for those with doctorates in the humanities, and my ability to find reliable employment after graduation has never been far from my mind. I've sometimes felt melancholic as I finished my dissertation: as a friend in a similar situation put

it, there's a chance that we're already late in our academic careers, and that our dissertations will be the end of our *oeuvre* rather than the start of it. A little depression is probably a necessary feature in every doctoral student's life, and—as is perhaps needless to say—thoughts like these about academic jobs certainly exacerbated those feelings. I'm enormously grateful to my sisters Erin and Kate, to my dad Bob and my stepmother Denise, and to my cousins Beth and John Flaherty (and Matt Flaherty, once again), for being such wonderful people—filled with humor and happiness—as to help me forget such thoughts from time to time. Lastly and most importantly, I want to thank my wife and best friend Willie, who put in the yeoman's effort of helping to copyedit my chapters as I submitted them, and who has been unflaggingly kind and supportive throughout my graduate career.

Contents

We Other Leavisites

The pages that follow this preface include two separate but interrelated lines of inquiry. The first traces the representation of moral agency and deliberation in the works of a series of Victorian novelists, arguing that each writer develops a sophisticated account of the relationship between reason and emotion in his or her depiction of moral decision-making. The second line of inquiry reflects on the methodology involved in this interpretive project, asking how one might justify such an overt attention to the intellectual content in what are, after all, artistic texts. The two arguments are thus relatively independent—the first line of inquiry engaging in literary criticism, while the second involves arguments in literary theory and the philosophy of art. But at the level of final justification, the two are necessary for each other: the interpretations invite a series of challenges that can only be met at the level of interpretive theory, while the theoretical model seems to me only ultimately defensible if it bears fruit in the interpretive realm in the form of interesting and insightful close readings. With this, as is perhaps the case with any argument in hermeneutic methodology, the proof is in the pudding.

In emphasizing the nature of moral deliberation in such novels, I hope to draw out the resonances between the ethics in Victorian fiction and the tradition of moral philosophy initiated by Immanuel Kant. Stefan Collini has recently suggested that there was a sort of "unreflective Kantianism" to "Victorian moral commonplaces"; he writes that the "morality characteristic of dominant Victorian culture" had four key features:

> First of all, morality was understood very much as a system of obligations in which, to adapt a suggestive phrase from a quite different context, 'only an obligation could beat an obligation', and in which, consequently, there was a tendency to extend the category of 'duty' as widely as possible. Secondly, the characterization of the alternative to performing one's duties stressed giving in to temptation or being seduced by one's inclinations, and these inclinations were regarded as inherently selfish. […] Thirdly, it was assumed that in any given situation there was always one moral right answer: all ultimate values are presumed to be compatible, and obligations, when clearly understood, cannot conflict. Fourthly, the 'others' whose welfare was the object of one's duties were coextensive with humanity as a whole.[1]

Each of these features is central to the elaborate system of moral philosophy Immanuel Kant established in a series of works at the end of the eighteenth century. In particular, at the center of Kant's thinking is a picture of the self where rational self-control is in conflict with selfish and egoistic desires; on this view, moral action requires mastering oneself to act on the basis of reasons. When properly understood, such reasons respond to the intrinsic value of other persons and generate clear right answers to moral dilemmas.

As Collini notes, the affinity did not result from any direct historical link with Kant's moral philosophy, which was not widely known even in intellectual circles until the end of the Victorian era.[2] Rather, the connection depended, it seems to me, upon something deeper: the confrontation with similar philosophical problems.[3] At its heart, Kant's moral philosophy is an ethics of freedom: his goal is to try to explain how it is that an agent who is

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[1] Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991): 63-64.

[2] Collini, 64. Moreover, Collini's comparison is not simple, as he acknowledges, the dominant strains of Victorian thought contain a number of deeply anti-Kantian elements. Nevertheless, even here Kantian views remain the background set of assumptions. I shall return to these issues more substantively in the chapters of the dissertation.

[3] Let me emphasize that this is my view, not Collini's; it's not clear that he would follow me in seeing the four features he identifies as stemming from a more substantive philosophical connection.

fundamentally free—indeed, about whom the only certain fact is precisely her status as a free agent—can be bound by moral laws. This puzzle led to the famously paradoxical notion at the heart of Kant's first attempt to derive the Categorical Imperative. Since we are all free, Kant thinks, the only law that could bind us would be a law that bound all rational agents.[4] So, the only possible law would be one stripped of all the particularities of identity and any individual desires. One might put this point by saying that agents should only act in ways that are compatible with principles that everyone could agree with on merely rational grounds. But then this, Kant argues, means just that one must act only on the basis of those maxims one could will as universal laws.

Readers for two hundred years have thought that Kant pulls a fast one in this argument.[5] Inferring the existence of a law from an articulation of the conditions for its possibility seems suspiciously to derive substance from absence: as Thomas Hill puts the point, Kant "moves from an undeniable formal principle to a dubious substantive principle," and it is not clear "how this transition can be made legitimately."[6] But the tension involved here is not an accidental fact or contingent feature of Kant's view: it stems precisely from the difficulty involved in the task he set himself, to explain how a law might carry normative force for creatures whose only distinguishing feature was the fact that no law seems to bind them.

Victorian society in the nineteenth century confronted very much the same tension. On the one hand, the era saw a breakdown in conceptions of morality as the product of tradition and religion. As discoveries in science threw the foundations of religious thought

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[4] This famous argument comes from Kant's *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Trans. Mary Gregor. Ed. Christine Korsgaard (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 31.
[5] For instance, Hegel famously called the categorical imperative an "empty formalism," on roughly these grounds. See G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right* (New York: Dover, 2005): 58.
[6] Thomas Hill, "Kant's Argument for the Rationality of Moral Conduct." *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 66 (1985): 3-23, 19.

into question, the Industrial Revolution broke apart many of the communities that established such norms. And on the other hand, the nineteenth century brought about unprecedented levels of political freedom in England, though not without significant conflict; furthermore, these changes were interrelated with a series of shifts in political thought, crystallized most powerfully in the passionate defense of freedom in thought and speech by John Stuart Mill. As a result of this tension, Victorian thinkers found themselves having to re-imagine the nature of morality, and to do so while confronting the very real fact of human freedom; moreover, they did so, like Kant, in the context of a moral code stemming largely from Protestant Christianity.[7] What is more, as will emerge in chapter 1, the solutions many of them arrived at—which emphasized the importance of autonomy and self-control in labor—parallel in striking ways the strategies Kant developed.

Victorian fiction, furthemore, occupied a particular place within the intellectual structure of Victorian society that makes it philosophically interesting for readers today. Moral philosophy in the Anglo-American academy has been, since the publication of John Rawls's 1971 landmark work *A Theory of Justice*, undergoing a revival of Kantian thought.[8] Writers like David Velleman, Christine Korsgaard, Susan Wolf, and others have seen in Kant's works important philosophical resources.[9] In the development of this line of research, the background has been a concurrent and equally resurgent neo-Aristotelian

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[7] The ideas in this paragraph are, I think, widely known and not controversial; however, I have drawn my understanding from Maurice Mandelbaum, *History, Man and Reason* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971) and Jerome Schneewind, *Backgrounds of English Victorian Literature* (New York: Random House, 1970). In particular, Mandelbaum's argument that a fundamental intellectual shift occurred in the discovery of the "malleability of man" and the rejection of strong claims about "human nature" connects closely to what I am suggesting is the ethical problem of freedom (141).

[8] See Ana Marta Gonzalez, "John Rawls and the New Kantian Moral Theory." In *The Legacy of John Rawls*, ed. Thom Brooks and Fabian Freyenhagen (New York: Continuum, 2005): 152-176.

[9] Thus Korsgaard: "Of course, another influence is that [Rawls] helped to create my great respect for Kant. In particular, I have been influenced by the broadly Kantian account of how people should relate to one another which characterizes Rawls's political philosophy as well as Kant's moral philosophy." "Internalism and the Sources of Normativity," interview with Christine Korsgaard by Herlinde Pauer-Studer. *Constructions of Practical Reason: Interviews on Moral and Political Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

tradition. While I shall have more to say about the details of these views in subsequent chapters, one feature of contemporary Aristotelian thought is its emphasis on the moral importance of the emotions: as Martha Nussbaum puts the point, they are "intelligent parts of our ethical agency, responsive to the workings of deliberation and essential to its completion."[10] This emphasis is quite deliberately meant to challenge the Kantian theory of moral deliberation, which relies on a reflective and conscious grasp of one's reasons. Both sides of this dialectic—the attempts from neo-Kantians to allow for the role of the emotions, and the neo-Aristotelian attempts to work out accounts of emotional deliberation—resonate with the thinking of Victorian novelists, who often sought to preserve the ethical importance of the emotions from what they saw as the overly rationalistic nature of mainstream moral thought.

These connections emerge first in the interpretation of George Eliot in Chapter 1, "George Eliot's Moral Philosophy." The principle at the center of George Eliot's ethics, the chapter argues, holds that a moral agent's beliefs about the good, whatever they are, must be "checked" by sympathy with other people. When seen against the background of Ludwig Feuerbach's conception of love as an affectively charged awareness of the abstract personhood of others, it becomes clear that Eliotic sympathy shares with respect, as described by Kant, the recognition of other persons as "ends in themselves." Moreover, Kant's portrayal of moral deliberation—which relies upon respect checking "self-love"—surprisingly fits with Eliot's view, insofar as she imagines agents who find "vocations" and then regulate the expression of those vocations through sympathetic awareness of others, thus preventing egoistic selfishness from corrupting their beliefs about the good.

[10] Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990): 41.

Chapter 2, "From Moral Psychology to Metaethics: Sidgwick, Eliot and Meredith on the Psychology of Selfishness," continues the investigation of egoism. The problem of "egoism" fascinated the Victorians, yet they disagreed substantially on how to understand it. This in part stems from the fact that the egoist represents both a challenge in moral psychology—how to develop and deliberate in ways that do not privilege oneself—and in metaethics, insofar as egoists represent a challenge to the very rationality of moral obligations, along the lines of Nietzsche's "immoralist." Chapter 2 picks up this second question, seeing in novelistic portrayals of egoism a way of thinking about the foundations of moral obligations. Henry Sidgwick, whose 1874 text *The Methods of Ethics* represents the culmination of the nineteenth-century utilitarian tradition, saw the egoist as quintessentially rational: she calculates which outcomes contribute best to her long-term interests and freely chooses those over outcomes that would contribute more to the interests of others. As a result of seeing the egoist this way, Sidgwick famously concluded that it was impossible to justify ethical norms on rational grounds: he regretfully concluded his analysis of the "Dualism of Practical Reason," the tension between the obligation to do what produces the greatest happiness overall and the obligation to do what produces the greatest happiness for oneself, by admitting that he could not show the egoist that the former was more rational than the latter in a world without God.

George Eliot and George Meredith, in their representations of egoism, anticipate the way contemporary neo-Kantians have tried to solve Sidgwick's problem: they deny the conception of rationality on which an agent can act in a self-controlled way in pursuit of his own interests while disregarding those of others. Both portray egoists as deeply irrational, and thus gesture towards what philosophers call "constitutive" theories of moral obligation, which see the rules of morality as constitutive of full agency, in roughly the same way certain

rules must be followed for an activity to constitute a game of chess. On Eliot's view, egoists emerge as pathologically self-approving, and thus moral growth depends upon the experience of disapproval. As the implications of her depiction of the process of moral growth suggest, the sympathetic awareness of others—which for Eliot is constitutive of moral recognition of them—stems naturally from the need for self-satisfaction, as one's desire for self-approval leads to consideration of the interests of other people. For George Meredith, the egoist is similarly irrational: he is self-deceived to the point of delusion, driven by un-recognized desires and thus heteronomous, and ultimately self-defeating. Against Sidgwick's conception of rational agency, Meredith thus suggests that agents who egoistically regard the reasons and goals of other people as unworthy of respect necessarily fail to properly respect their own goals.

Chapter 3, "Charles Dickens on Identity and Moral Obligation" suggests that Dickens reformulates in affective terms a core tension in Kantian thought. As John Rawls's work on political liberalism has made clear, Kant's thought depends on a negotiation between a sort of thin self, which is the self of pure rational agency, and a thick self, which is the self conceived as a member of particular communities and with particular interests. The distinctive structural relations between protagonists and minor characters in Charles Dickens's fiction, which combine surprisingly bland protagonists with rich and eccentric minor characters, represent a way of thinking about the problem of the conflict between obligations that stem from a concrete identity and those that stem from mere humanity. But Dickens does not see mere humanity as the ability to be a rational agent; he sees it instead as depending upon the capacity for moral sentiment. The bland protagonists are ideal not because of their abstract reason, but because their identity does not interfere with the expression of moral emotion.

Finally, Chapter 4 turns away from the emphasis on Victorian neo-Kantianism, and lets Anthony Trollope stand in for the tradition of Victorian moral thought that rejected Kantian assumptions about the self. In particular, Trollope's repeated depiction of protagonists who are romantically committed to one character but drawn to another makes the philosophical problem of akrasia or "weakness of the will" central, as the novels return repeatedly and reflectively to agents who act against their own best judgment about whom they should be with. Moreover, when read with an eye towards akrasia, Trollope's novels reveal a complex array of the forms of irrationality: characters like the Duke of Omnium reflect the way desires can affect belief-formation to cause self-deception, while figures like George Vavasor indicate the fact that even unbiased judgments may fail to move an agent. The rejection of the Kantian theory of rational behavior, which emphasizes the deliberative importance of judgment, emerges most substantively in Trollope's depiction of states of "ethical confusion," where characters act irrationally precisely by acting on the basis of their best judgment. As Nomy Arpaly has recently noted, one's best judgment is after all just another belief, and can be mistaken in the same way any other belief can. In states of ethical confusion, an agent's best judgment is in fact systematically mistaken, and recalcitrant emotions that refuse to be mastered may actually be guides to an agent's real best interests.

In emphasizing the philosophical subtlety of the engagement with ethics in Victorian fiction, this project continues an avenue of research that is at once new and old. While any generalization about the Victorian novel and the corresponding study of it is bound to be imprecise—Kathleen Tillotson's remark in 1954 that the range of Victorian novels "is too vast and vague to lead to any useful generalization" remains accurate—the critical study of the ethics in Victorian fiction may roughly be said to stem from two mid-century critical

giants: F.R. Leavis and Raymond Williams.[11] In *The Great Tradition*, Leavis developed—or, perhaps more precisely, asserted—an aesthetics of fiction that placed high emphasis on "a marked moral intensity" in a text: disputing Henry James's insistence on a novelistic art based on pure form, he argued that any "great novelist" would combine an attention to form with "imaginative sympathy, moral discrimination, and judgment of relative human value."[12] In practice, however, Leavis was less interested in explicating the moral thought of the novelists he thought merited inclusion in the "great tradition" than in commending them for their moral seriousness, while condemning their less serious rivals. One might take his suggestion that George Eliot conceives *Felix Holt*'s Mrs. Transome "in an imagination that is profoundly moral" but presents the character with a "psychological observation so utterly convincing in its significance that the price paid by Mrs. Transome […] doesn't need a moralist's insistence" as a typical example of Leavis's tendency to move to aesthetic evaluation with an eye towards morality rather than devoting interpretive attention to the moral view involved (71).

Williams, however, regarded the emphasis on ethics in Victorian fiction as significantly less commendable. In *Culture and Society: 1780-1950*, he developed an influential reading of a subgenre of Victorian fiction he termed the "industrial novels," which depicted life in an "unsettled industrial society."[13] Tracing the way such novelists represented what

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[11] Kathleen Tillotson, *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 1. For my understanding of the tradition of criticism on the Victorian novel, I am indebted to two sources: Frances O' Gorman's Blackwell Guide to Criticism, *The Victorian Novel* (Malden: Blackwell, 2002) and James Eli Adams, "A History of Criticism on the Victorian Novel," *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*. 2nd ed. ed. Deirdre David (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 62-83.

[12] F.R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (London: Penguin, 1972), 18, 41. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

[13] Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983): 87. Williams's view should be understood—though he doesn't put it quite this way—as a variation of the view developed by Kathleen Tillotson and especially Louis Cazamian, who suggested that the English "social problem" novel posed an "idealism" that respected sensation and emotion against the "individualism" that emphasized rational abstraction of the political economists. *The Social Problem Novel in England, 1830-1850: Dickens, Disraeli, Mrs.*

they saw as the threat of radical political reform, he argued that while they sought to demonstrate sympathy with the suffering working classes, writers like Dickens, Eliot, Gaskell, and Disraeli fell back on the importance of individual morality as a consequence of an inability or unwillingness to imagine genuine political change. As he summarizes the point, "Recognition of evil was balanced by fear of becoming involved. Sympathy was transformed, not into action, but into withdrawal" (109). Significantly, he suggests that the novelists may only be inchoately aware of this aspect of their works. For instance, he suggests that Dickens's "positives do not lie in social improvement, but rather in what he sees as the elements of human nature—personal kindness, sympathy, and forbearance"; this refusal to imagine any social alternative carries the tone of a man "who has 'seen through' society, who has found them all out," which is essentially "the retained position of an adolescent" (96). As such, Williams concludes, Dickens's *Hard Times* "is more of a symptom of the confusion of industrial society than an understanding of it" (96). [14]

Similarly, in *The Country and the City*, Williams argues again that George Eliot turns to morality as a result of an inability to confront more difficult problems. He writes:

> A valuing society, the common condition of a knowable community, belongs ideally in the past. It can be recreated there for a widely ranging moral action. But the real step that has been taken is withdrawal from any full response to an existing society. Value is in the past, as a general retrospective condition, and is in the present only as a particular and private sensibility, the individual moral action. (180)

Gaskell, Kingsley. Trans. Martin Fido (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), 4. For my understanding of Cazamian, I am indebted to O'Gorman, *The Victorian Novel*, 151.

[14] As Williams emphasizes, the problem is that Dickens shakes his head at the possibility of political reform while condemning those who try for it: "the hopeless and passive suffering are set against the attempts of the working people to better their conditions" (96).

Williams's point here is that Eliot's works do not imagine current social problems as admitting of a solution. There is a distinctive tension in Eliot's later works, he suggests, that arises from her recognition of "want"—the masses of English society in need of political and economic support—and an inability to see them as a "knowable community" which she can imaginatively inhabit (172). Instead, the modernizing England becomes a "known" community, one understood from the outside with a different sensibility. Given this breakup, value exists in the present only in "individual moral action," rather than in the shared evaluations of what Williams calls the "structure of feelings" in a knowable community.

In both cases, then, Williams ended up positing the moral thought in such novels as more revealing for what it did not do than as worthy of analysis in what it did: his diagnosis of Dickens's moral reflections in *Hard Times* as an essentially adolescent symptom of the political problems of industrial society is telling. Probably Williams did not mean to include Eliot in this description: he remarks strikingly in the *The Country and the City*, "I feel enough connection with the problems George Eliot was facing to believe I could make these points in her presence," an attitude that suggests he regards Eliot as a fellow interlocutor thinking through a certain political issue rather than as an unreflective and symptomatic product of her era (170). But subsequent criticism on the ethics in Victorian fiction tended to dismiss the notion of Victorian novelists as reflective interlocutors in favor of the sort of symptomatic reading Williams gestures at in his discussion of Dickens.

The arguments involved in the development of these views—from Catherine Gallagher, Mary Poovey, and Nancy Armstong, among others—are too complex to admit of

easy summary, especially in this context.[15] What is significant here, however, is the way these critics came to think of the novel as a sort of discourse, one in which the activities of the participants represent less a reflective engagement with a problem than the product of a certain set of conditions of possibility. As Poovey argues, "Largely because of the eighteenth-century disaggregation of moral philosophy into political economy and aesthetics, the ways of knowing epitomized by these discourses had become gendered by the early nineteenth century"; thus, "when novelists entered the condition-of-England debate," "they were implicitly arguing that a feminized genre that individualized distress and aroused sympathy was more appropriate to the delineation of contemporary problems than were the rationalizing abstractions of a masculine genre like political economy" (133). For my purposes, what matters in this argument is the collapse of distinctions and corresponding distillation of an ethical view: less important than the difference between such novelists are the commonalities created by a shared discourse. Correspondingly, what matters in such fiction is less the way such figures might individually think about the process of "rational abstraction" than their combination as jointly asserting the validity of a field of analysis in which abstraction is not relevant at all.

Of course, these ways of thinking about the nature of ethics in Victorian fiction should be understood as complementary to and complemented by the broader discussion of realist fiction itself as a discourse, one playing a key role in the constitution of the bourgeois liberal subject. Again the arguments of the key critics—Catherine Belsey and D.A. Miller, among others—are too complex to summarize rapidly, but on this view the ethics in Victorian fiction represent less substantive thought worthy of engagement than the evidence

[15] I have in mind here Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Mary Poovey, Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830-1864 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); and Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

of an ideology that requires diagnosis. As Belsey contends, realism is "a predominantly conservative form," because "the world evoked in the fiction, its patterns of cause and effect, of social relationships and moral values, largely confirm the patters of the world we seem to know."[16]

Against such views, a group of recent critics has increasingly resisted the diagnosis of ethical thought in Victorian fiction as a symptomatic discourse, and seen instead such writers as powerful thinkers in their own right; it is with this more recent tradition—initiated by George Levine, Amanda Anderson, and Andrew Miller—that the arguments here align. Indeed, my argument that Victorian novelists offer complex accounts of the relationship between reason and emotion in moral deliberation naturally complements George Levine's suggestion that Victorian fiction questions epistemologies that hold as an ideal the erasure of the self and its moral stance, Amanda Anderson's suggestion that Victorian writers sought to develop forms of detachment that balanced the need for reflective impartiality with the value of embedded habit, and Andrew Miller's suggestion that the novel engages the moral psychology of moral perfectionism.[17] Nor is it unique in so doing: Jil Larson, Valerie Wainwright, and Rachel Hollander, though they come from a variety of theoretical perspectives, share with Levine, Anderson, and Miller the sense that the ethics in Victorian fiction are worthy of analysis in their own right, and that it is a critical mistake to reduce such views to a political ideology.[18] While the subsequent analyses in this dissertation will disagree

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[16] Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London: Methuen, 1982): 43. See also D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

[17] See Levine, *Dying to Know: Scientific Epistemology and Narrative in Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), and *Realism, Ethics, and Secularism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Andrew H. Miller, *The Burdens of Perfection* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008). For a survey of this recent movement, I am indebted to Hao Li, "Deploying 'Ethics' in Victorian England." *Literature Compass* 7.3 (2010): 226-242, 227.

[18] See Jil Larson, *Ethics and Narrative in the English Novel, 1880-1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Valerie Wainwright, *Ethics and the English Novel from Austen to Forster* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2007); and

with each of these writers about how to interpret particular novelists, these should be understood for the local disagreements they are, not as substantive challenges to the research program.

Nevertheless there are some methodological commitments, common in this avenue of research, which I wish to avoid. Each stems from an impulse that I share, but carries implications that fundamentally alter the nature of the interpretation. First, it is a commonplace in such considerations to situate such novels in an intellectual history of the Victorian era, and to demarcate the set of novels under consideration on historical grounds. Rachel Hollander's work represents a typical example:

> As colonial conflicts, nationalist anxiety, and the intensification of the woman question become dominant cultural concerns in the 1870s and '80s, the problem of self and other, known and unknown, begins to saturate the representation of home in the English novel. In the wake of an erosion of confidence in the ability to understand that which is unlike the self, I argue, a moral code founded on sympathy gives way to an ethics of hospitality. (3)

Similarly, Vanessa Ryan has recently suggested, in *Thinking without Thinking in the Victorian Novel*, that "recuperating [a] non-Darwinian history of mental science" points to a new aspect of the representation of consciousness in Victorian fiction:

> The focus of Victorian psychology on the opacity of the mind, however, demanded a reorientation, away from questions of the knowability of the content or nature of the mind to its functions. What sets much of mid-Victorian fiction apart from its earlier counterparts is the centrality of the

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Rachel Hollander, *Narrative Hospitality in Late Victorian Fiction: Novel Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 2012). In addition to these works, which address a number of writers, there are a large number of recent studies that emphasize the ethical thought of a particular novelist.

> new approach to thinking. It is not so much human agency that is crucial to these novels […] but their engagement with what I am calling "dynamics"—the interaction between self and environment, which is not wholly agential or wholly conscious.[19]

I think I understand—and if I do, I share—the impulses that lead Hollander and Ryan to put their claims in this way: they stem from a desire to be historically responsible, both in recognizing the impact of political and social events (Hollander) and the effects of a particular period in intellectual history (Ryan). Certainly, this preface did something similar in its invocation of Victorian Kantianism. Perhaps even more than Hollander, moreover, Ryan demonstrates the corresponding desire to draw her terms from the Victorians themselves, and to ground her suggestions about what the thoughts of Victorian writers with consideration toward the particular words they would have used to think them.

But the implications of this emphasis on history seem to me problematic. They have the effect of moving the primary claim away from literary criticism and towards a more properly historical contention, one which it is not clear literary criticism by itself is capable of answering. To take Hollander's analysis first, whether late-Victorian fiction reflects in important ways on an ethics of hospitality is an interesting question in and of itself: the claim that they are the first to do so depends upon a comparison that would be very difficult to prove, as one would need to move systematically through the thinking about ethics in the fiction of preceding eras, and the notion that the shift stems from certain political events depends upon a logic of correlation that seems insufficient—as one might put the objection, surely the 1870s were not the first time English writers were forced to confront the problem of "self and other."

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[19] Vanessa Ryan, *Thinking without Thinking in the Victorian Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012): 13. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

Similarly, it is not clear that Ryan's claims are convincing as intellectual history. Ryan is committed to a strong claim about the novelty of Victorian analysis of the "opacity" of the mind—she speaks of "the distinctive rethinking of thinking in Victorian fiction" (13)—but as she goes on to argue, this appears primarily in the depiction of characters who are inchoately aware of something they reflectively dismiss or whose emotions sense something they do not consciously acknowledge immediately. And it is difficult to agree that this is really unique to Victorian literature, and thus the notion that it results from changes in psychological discourse—from the "mental science" she painstakingly recovers—becomes less plausible.[20] Again, this is not to deny the value or insight of the analysis—whether there are philosophically insightful investigations of consciousness in Victorian fiction is an interesting question—but shifting the upshot of the analysis to historical grounds distracts the argument from the literary-critical claim, and correspondingly makes the argument both manifold in nature and more susceptible to objection.

Similarly, I want to resist what is perhaps the most common strategy in analyses of the ethics in Victorian fiction—those that do so in service of a philosophical argument. Certainly this is among Anderson's goals; she sees the investigation of Victorian authors as serving to help develop an understanding of the promises and dangers in cultivating practices of detachment, which suffer from the "current denigration of explicit ideals of critical distance" (23). Similarly, Jil Larson suggests at the end of her monograph that Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* develops an objection to standard accounts of the wrongness of lying, with a narrative complexity unattainable in traditional moral philosophy (117). And as is perhaps unsurprising, this is the most common outcome when moral philosophers themselves turn to Victorian fiction; thus Martha Nussbaum sees Dickens's *Hard Times* as

[20] I touch on this point in my review of *Thinking without Thinking*, which is forthcoming in *Victorian Review*.

offering a powerful objection to rational-choice theory as it is commonly understood in economic discourse.[21]

Again, I think I understand and share the impulse that lies behind these arguments. Such criticism involves bringing literary texts into conversations that thinkers care about, and in so doing, critics demonstrate the value of the text involved. Moreover, by emphasizing the literary writers as valuable participants in a philosophical conversation—rather than explicating them as holding a position other philosophers have delineated—they treat such writers as thinkers in their own right, not reducible as illustrators or exemplars of a view someone else put more clearly. However, again the implications of the interpretive strategy seem to me problematic. Such arguments must negotiate a tension: on the one hand, they seek to explicate the ideas in a text; on the other hand, they seek to develop the strongest philosophical argument on their view. These two goals often come apart. Moreover, even when they do not directly contradict each other, the energy devoted to the literary criticism can seem unjustified when the argument turns to demonstrating its philosophical claim. By concluding with a philosophical contention, such interpretations can imply that the literary interpretation serves only a philosophical use. The goal, then, is to develop a criticism capable of explicating a writer's ideas and bringing them into conversation with contemporary thought, but doing so without imposing a philosophical agenda.

One useful example of the kind of argument I want to avoid comes from my own work. In my 2011 essay "Jane Austen on Love and Pedagogical Power," I sought to call attention to the fact that Jane Austen's depictions of pedagogical dynamics in loving relationships—in other words, teachers falling in love with students, and vice versa—were

[21] *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and the Public Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

oftentimes attentive to the power structures in such relationships.[22] Far from making love impossible, however, power seemed to serve as a necessary feature for the achievement of love. Demonstrating that one could submit to and subsequently dominate another, I argued, was an essential part of falling in love in Austen. Drawing on Jessica Benjamin's psychoanalytic reconstruction of G.W.F. Hegel's master-slave dynamic, which suggested that the eroticism of sado-masochistic relationships stemmed from what Hegel thought of as the need for the master to impose his self upon the world and make it recognize him, I saw a complex philosophical background to Austen's narratives. Moreover, in the fact that her novels show relationships where students and teachers exchange roles before finally falling in love, I discerned Austen echoing Hegel's emphasis on reciprocal recognition—recognition received from a fellow agent only after recognition is extended.

However, at a number of moments, I phrased the interpretation as if I was engaging in a philosophical dispute with Hegel and Benjamin while using Austen as an ally. For instance, I wrote, "To a certain extent, we can read this as Austen asking, 'What happens if the Lord's attempt to control the Bondsman fails?' (758). This way of putting it implies that my argument was in part philosophical, in which case the reading of *Pride and Prejudice* I offer would simply be confusing, a sidetrack on the road to an interpretation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* or a claim about the nature of reciprocal recognition. If the question at hand really were what happens in the conflict between the Lord and the Bondsman—as opposed to how best to understand *Pride and Prejudice*, which was actually the point of my essay—then the extensive literary criticism would largely be a distraction.

Finally, I want to resist the tendency to think that the moral thought in the Victorian novel either stems from or contributes to an understanding of its form. There is an instinct,

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[22] Patrick Fessenbecker, "Jane Austen on Love and Pedagogical Power." *SEL* 51.4 (Autumn 2011): 747-763. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

not unique to considerations of ethics in the Victorian novel, to invoke sophisticated philosophical positions as necessary to explain some formal complexity of a literary text.[23] This is, for instance, what J. Hillis Miller seems to have in mind in *The Ethics of Reading*: in a discussion of *Adam Bede*, he claims that even though the novel is committed in its "overt affirmations" to "realism as exact reproduction," its "covert argument is for a use of figurative language."[24] The tension between these two impulses is not an accident, but is rather the necessary result of the "law of reading," which involves the way the text makes present its own unreadability (122). Correspondingly, both George Levine and Andrew Miller are deeply interested in the notion that certain aspects of the form of the Victorian novel carry theoretical implications. Miller, for instance, is interested in the "orchestration of perspective" in the novel; he argues that some Victorian novelists saw the problem of "weakness of will," where an agent acts against her own judgment, not as a problem of psychological capacities—as philosophers tend to see the problem—but as a problem of perspectives. As he explains, "adopting an external, third-person point of view […] seems to invite those disabilities of the will that were so robustly feared by the Victorians," since it "can obscure the fact that what I do is a matter of making commitments"; on the other hand, the first-person perspective can seem to be a mere pretense of control over one's actions, a self-deceived refusal to acknowledge the truth the third-person perspective would convey (63-64). Correspondingly, the alternative perspectives in Victorian fiction, particularly its development and depiction of second-person relations, negotiate this problem.

Once more, I understand and share the motivating impulse, which I take to be the acknowledgment that literary texts are not philosophy: they often rely in various ways on

[23] For instance, these are the grounds Paul Armstrong invokes for his theoretical frame in *The Phenomenology of Henry James* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983).
[24] J. Hillis Miller, *The Ethics of Reading* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987): 75. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

indirect effects from their formal structures, which moreover stem from traditions of genres, and not to emphasize such form in an account of such novels seem to dismiss precisely their distinguishing features. But the implication of such accounts is that the ideas in such texts, and the theoretical discourses the critic invokes more generally, are primarily worthy of attention in relation to the form. In this way, direct attention to the ideas themselves gets subsumed as part of an argument about other features of the text. For instance, Miller at one point notes that Anthony Trollope' novel *The Prime Minister* is deeply interested in "weakness of will"; I agree, and in fact Chapter 4 is very much a development of this insight. But my chapter is necessary because in some sense Miller did not develop his own idea: moving on to his analysis of the implications of formal features, he chose to dismiss the overt thinking in the text about the same issue (77).

Let me try to sum up the approach this dissertation thus takes. The goal will be to explicate the ethical thought in Victorian fiction. It will do so with an eye towards intellectual history, in such a way that its claims accord with the historical features of Victorian thought, but I am not making a historical claim: I am not suggesting that Victorian fiction is uniquely neo-Kantian, or that the neo-Kantian elements of Victorian fiction point to some new claim about the novel's history. Similarly, the explication will proceed by drawing on current moral philosophy, in hopes of connecting the novelists to issues of relevance today, but I am not making a philosophical claim: the dissertation does not develop an argument about the correct way to conceive moral agency, nor does it see the novelists as capturing truths philosophers could not have come to by themselves. Finally, although the dissertation will reflect extensively on the nature of literary form, it will do so only as a means to assess when a critic can legitimately say a text has asserted an idea: I will not claim that moral philosophy

is necessary as an interpretive tool because of some confusion or difficulty in understanding some text's formal features.

This is to say in short that I regard the literary texts as worthy of attention in part because of the ideas they express, and that engaging with those ideas—even if that engagement is not paired with some other argumentative goal—constitutes a legitimate interpretation of them. It would not be unfair to call this an updated Leavis-ism. I do not share Leavis's particular aesthetic judgments (he consigned Meredith and Trollope as "ruck," and had famously negative views of Dickens for most of his life) nor his audacity in making bold and summary aesthetic evaluations (I shall at most be prepared to talk about aptness for the application of particular aesthetic concepts) nor—most importantly—his belief that the moral qualities of literature had a reliably positive effect on readers, developing them ethically (as I will suggest in the next chapter, I think critics have a tendency to speak far too quickly about the effects of texts on readers; I see this as a fundamentally empirical question, one to be assessed on the basis of study of what readers actually do, and thus not a question for literary criticism at all). But Leavis's notion that moral intensity could be a positive feature of a literary text, and that moral discrimination and judgment could be a part of great fiction, is a view I share.

In suggesting this, moreover, I want to emphasize that this is not substantively different from actual critical practice in the new trend of criticism on the ethical views in Victorian fiction. In George Levine's remark that it is a mistake to "condescend to the Victorians," to assume that "we have got past their questions"; in Anderson's claim that "contemporary theory could be viewed more charitably as a continuation of the very struggle over terms and ideals that characterizes the Victorian encounter with modernity"; and in Miller's suggestion that it is an interest in "moral psychology" that "distinguishes nineteenth-

century British literature," and that dismissing this fact "ignores a large part of what these texts have to offer, and to that degree makes less reasonable the desire to study them," it seems possible to hear updated versions of the essentially Leavisian view that the serious moral thought in Victorian fiction gives contemporary readers a reason to read it.[25]

And even in texts less overt about their methodology, the structure of the claims ends up implying that the ideas in the text make it worthy of attention. To see this, let us return briefly to Vanessa Ryan's reading in *Thinking without Thinking*. In the conclusion, she suggests that the real value of her close readings is philosophical: "the engagement of Victorian novelists and scientists with the problems and potential of nonreasoned thought offers a fruitful basis for rethinking questions of consciousness today"(180). But the book has not shown this, or really attempted to do so: demonstrating the fruitfulness of Victorian thought would require a detailed consideration of present problems and an argument that one could derive solutions from Victorian thinkers, and Ryan's book does not contain a substantive discussion of the present debates. At other moments, as I've suggested, she suggests that the upshot of her book will be historical. But the book is not primarily devoted to the history of mental science; Ryan's extensive and nuanced discussion of fiction would be an interesting but ultimately minor footnote to a history of psychology and brain science.

Instead, it seems to me, the primary value of Ryan's argument is aesthetic. This is apparent in the implications of what she calls "a central claim of this book": her argument that "the nineteenth-century 'psychological novel' puts into question the very interiority of 'inner' thoughts and feelings, thereby radically redefining the nature of thinking" (7). It is worth pausing to ask, if this claim is persuasive—and I think it is—what makes it interesting. Not, presumably, because we now think of thinking as a sort of interiority and require

[25] See Levine, *Realism, Ethics, and Secularism*, 53; Anderson, *The Powers of Distance*, 23; and Miller, *The Burdens of Perfection*, xi.

arguments against this claim; Ryan treats the "dynamic" view of consciousness as clearly correct and not in need of further support. Nor is the claim compelling because it matters for the history of science: while intellectual historians might be interested to learn that the thinking about consciousness in nineteenth-century fiction is so subtle, at the end of the day they are writing the history of certain disciplines, and those disciplines do not and did not include fiction in their discursive fields. Instead, the claim is primarily interesting to literary historians and literary critics: Ryan's insightful and careful analyses of canonical novels represent important contributions to literary scholarship. But this presupposes two claims in aesthetics: first, that these novels, as opposed to some others, are worth understanding, and merit the sort of close analysis Ryan gives; second, that readers can engage with such texts meaningfully by understanding their intellectual content. Indeed, the implication of Ryan's commendation of the "fruitfulness" of Victorian thinking about consciousness in such texts is that the second claim supports the first—in other words, that the surprisingly prescient insights of Victorian novelists create the aesthetic value that makes them worthy of study.

As should be clear, I agree with these claims: I think that profound thinking can give literary value to a particular text. But other critics do not, and it seems to me this way of thinking about literature requires a defense it has not yet received. The second line of inquiry in this dissertation, therefore, is devoted to drawing out possible objections to readings that emphasize the intellectual content in literature and developing responses to them. It is, first of all, an interpretive problem: in keeping with the worry about the implications of artistic form, interlocutors might reasonably point out that there is a sort of category error in reading so overtly for the intellectual content. The introduction, "In Defense of Paraphrase," tries to meet this objection, articulating a "content formalist" approach that seeks to combine primary attention to the content of literary texts while recognizing the implications

of literary form. In so doing, it argues that moral philosophy can be essential to narrative, insofar as characters—in their decisions and actions—necessarily represent claims about moral psychology; the second interlude, "On Narrative Equilibrium and Reflective Equilibrium" turns directly to this theory of narrative, arguing that realist form imposes a philosophical test in requiring the actions of characters to feel plausible to readers.

The interpretive problem has an additional dimension: because it brings writers from the past into conversation with contemporary issues, reading for the content entails describing works anachronistically. The first interlude, "Justifying Anachronistic Frames," defends a modified version of such "presentism," and finds in the debate surrounding Quentin Skinner's "contextualist" approach in the history of ideas valuable resources for its defense. In particular, Richard Rorty's distinction between "historical" and "rational" reconstructions, where the former insists on rendering a view in a thinker's own words while the latter involves sympathetically rendering the view in contemporary terms, clarifies the relationship between the competing impulses to bring literary works into conversation with current issues and to understand them in their own terms. A new version of Gadamer's hermeneutic circle correspondingly emerges: an oscillation between historical reconstruction and rational reconstruction, between understanding an author's thought as she would have described it and understanding it with the benefit of later developments, offers a reading technique that responds to the contextualist and the presentist.

Finally, reading for the content depends upon some controversial claims in aesthetics. There are two problems: first, as may have become clear, the approach I am recommending has a complex relation to the idea of philosophical truth. I am not claiming that the reflections on moral agency in the authors I consider are necessarily correct, or even represent the current most plausible views; as I indicated in my discussion of my Jane

Austen essay, this approach seems to me to shift the upshot of analysis into pure philosophy. But I also have suggested that the ideas in such novels are interesting because they matter for us now. Surely, one might object, they can only matter for us now if they might be true: it is not clear that one can give an account as to what it means for an idea to be "serious," "profound," "insightful," or "worthy of attention" independently of an argument that it represents the best way to think about some current issue.

Second, the overt appeal to aesthetic value represents a gesture that—in keeping with the widespread rejection of Leavis across the literary academy—many critics would find unacceptable. Notions of the aesthetic, as critics like Paul de Man, John Guillory, and Barbara Herrnstein-Smith have argued, are inescapably ideological, and thus one ought always to recognize that claims about it represent less assessments of genuine properties of the work of art and instead function in the generation of cultural capital, or perhaps as techniques in ideological positioning. The arguments here, again, bear a complex relation to this critique: in reading so overtly for the intellectual content, the approach tacitly accepts the rejection of the notion of aesthetic autonomy and its corresponding claim that works of art merit attention for their formal properties alone. Yet it shares with the response to the critiques of the aesthetic—offered by a group of critics Marjorie Levinson has called the "New Formalism"—the sense that artistic evaluation is not reducible to ideological mystification.

While a full aesthetic theory requires a separate and more extensive treatment, "thick" aesthetic concepts offer promising resources for meeting these two objections. They avoid the circularity of many defenses of formalism—the praiseworthiness of formal features derives from their presence in canonical texts, which are held to be valuable because of their formal features—by combining the evaluative and the interpretive judgment. Thus,

the conclusion to the dissertation, "The Challenge of Aesthetic Skepticism and the Importance of Being Profound," suggests that the chapters have explicated the properties of literary texts that make the application of the thick concept "profound" apt. While admitting that clear conditions of applicability do not seem to be possible, I suggest that one might reasonably see profundity as a product of a creative and innovative approach to an important and fundamental theoretical problem.

Now, one might note that this preface, as a part of that defense, has a certain air of question-begging about it. I have derived my argument that Victorian moral thought represents a substantive intellectual contribution from a previous critical tradition; thus, the question as to whether this is the right way to think about the relationship between ethics and literature at all went tacitly unaddressed. Furthermore, one might be skeptical that one can strip away the respectively historical, philosophical, and formal components of the tradition of interpretations of ethics in Victorian fiction without fundamentally altering the arguments. Surely, the thinking might go, these methodological components served as necessary means for the invoking of philosophical materials whose interpretive use would otherwise lack justification. As a result of this, the next portion of my argument—the introduction—will not assume any of the arguments in this preface, but will instead try to motivate the kind of criticism I will practice from a stance outside of Victorian studies. This will require that I return to some topics it might seem I have already covered—for instance, I will soon be offering another genealogy of criticism on the novel, one that takes a wider perspective and which has a very different conclusion—but it has the essential advantage of justifying interpretations of the ethical thought in fiction without appealing to the prior instinct that such criticism is worth doing.

In *Ideas and the Novel*, from which I take among other things my title, Mary McCarthy suggested that nineteenth-century fiction in the period just before Henry James formed the great era of the "novel of ideas," precisely because there was no such separate category. She writes, "So intrinsic to the novelistic medium were ideas and other forms of commentary, all tending to 'set' the narration in a general scheme, that it would have been impossible in former days to speak of 'the novel of ideas.' It would have seemed a tautology."[26] Without necessarily agreeing with McCarthy's literary history, I certainly agree that substantive thinking is central to the novelistic art in the Victorian era. Certainly for me, a substantive part of what it means to engage a text like *Middlemarch* is to think about it, to reflect on the moral view Eliot puts forward. This project stems, in the last analysis, from a desire to do justice to that feeling.

[26] Mary McCarthy, *Ideas and the Novel* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980): 18.

Ideas in poetry are usually stale and false, and no one older than sixteen would find it worth his while to read poetry merely for what it says. – George Boas

Teachers of Literature are apt to think up such problems as "What is the author's purpose?" or still worse, "What is the guy trying to say?" – Vladimir Nabokov

In Defense of Paraphrase

In *Literature and the Taste of Knowledge*, Michael Wood notes that the question of the relationship between knowledge and literature is a very old one.[27] Wood develops one common understanding of this question, which sees it as asking whether the aesthetic qualities of literature give rise to a special type of knowledge—that is, a type of knowledge literature offers by virtue of its form (3). Indeed, Wood is so aware of the peculiar nature of aesthetic experience that he "continues to wonder […] whether knowledge is the right word for what we keep meeting in literature (12).[28] Wood does not refer to what philosophers of art call the "cognitivist/anti-cognitivist debate," but he could have: his position is recognizably similar to, for instance, that of Gordon Graham, who suggests literature has the peculiar ability "to reveal to us 'how it feels' as well as 'how it is'"; this is to say that literature can thus enter "directly into [our moral] experience in a way that abstract principles of conduct, even if they existed, could not."[29] Again, there is a special kind of knowledge that

[27]He finds its roots in Plato's *Republic*, where the poets were famously expelled for the way they appeared to make knowledge claims without evidence. *Literature and the Taste of Knowledge* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 2. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.
[28] In this context, Wood draws upon Stathis Gourgouris's *Does Literature Think?,* which claims that literature offers a special access to non-propositional knowledge. *Does Literature Think?* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2003). As Gourgouris notes, the notion of literature as offering non-propositional knowledge is one he borrows from Pierre Macherey (Gourgouris 344 n12); the Macherey text in question is *The Object of Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
[29] "Aesthetic Cognitivism and the Literary Arts." *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 30.1 (Spring 1996): 1-17, 17.

literature offers by virtue of the sort of thing it is, which is not quite comprehensible in the terms of any other discourse.

Now Wood and Graham might be right to think that literary texts offer a special sort of knowledge, but it seems to me that the propositional claims literary texts make deserve equal attention. If literary texts are valuable in part because of their peculiar ability to show us "how it feels," part of their value also lies in the profound thinking that appears in their representation of "how it is." In short, I want to argue that literary texts are in part interesting because of the ideas they express. By way of introduction to the sort of reading entailed by an attention to literary ideas, let me offer a brief example from George Eliot's *Middlemarch*.

Speaking about his daughter's refusal to burn a will upon her employer's request, Caleb Garth explains to the Reverend Farebrother:

> Mary, you understand, could do no such thing—would not be handling his iron chest, and so on. Now, you see, the will he wanted burnt was this last, so that if Mary had done what he wanted, Fred Vincy would have had ten thousand pounds. […] That touches poor Mary close; she couldn't help it—she was in the right to do what she did, but she feels, as she says, much as if she had knocked down somebody's property and broken it against her will, when she was rightfully defending herself."[30]

Susan, Caleb's wife, offers her assessment:

> "Mary could not have acted otherwise, even if she had known what would be the effect on Fred," said Mrs. Garth […] "And she was quite ignorant of it. It seems to me, a loss which falls on another because we have done right is not to lie upon our conscience."

[30] *Middlemarch* (New York: Penguin, 1965): 441-42.

Caleb replies to that:

> "It's the feeling. The child feels in that way, and I feel with her. You don't mean your horse to tread on a dog when you're backing out of the way; but it goes through you, when it's done."

And Mr. Farebrother concludes the conversation:

> "I am sure Mrs. Garth would agree with you there," said Mr. Farebrother […] "One could hardly say that the feeling you mention about Fred is wrong—or rather, mistaken—though no man ought to make a claim on such feeling."

Underneath the essentially conversational tone of this exchange is a subtle philosophical point.[31] Mary is concerned about what the philosophical tradition calls the problem of "dirty hands." [32] Bernard Williams describes the essential point thus: "each of us is specially responsible for what *he* does, rather than for what other people do."[33] The point here is simply that it is morally relevant *who* is responsible for bringing about a given set of consequences. This is to say that Mary does not precisely object to Mr. Featherstone's actions, but rather to the inappropriateness of her involvement with them: as Caleb puts it, she "could do no such thing, would not be handling his iron chest and so forth." In other

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[31] Somewhat ironically, Gary Saul Morson cites this scene as evidence of the fact that novels do not make ordinary philosophical claims: "In a quite remarkable discussion, the characters agree on what I imagine a philosopher would regard as a paradox, if not an incoherence: that Mary did the right thing, but that nevertheless it is also right that she feel guilty for doing so." "Review of *Dostoevsky the Thinker*." *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* 9 (2002). URL: http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/23116-dostoevsky-the-thinker. As will become clear, in my opinion Morson has too narrow a conception of what moral philosophers have said and can say about ethical life: the tension he notes is one they are prepared to acknowledge. I thank Matt Flaherty for directing me to Morson's essay.

[32] This problem, which is central to a good deal of political philosophy as well as moral thinking, has a long history: for a summary, see the entry on the "Problem of Dirty Hands" in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, at http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/dirty-hands/. For a classic discussion, see Bernard Williams "Politics and Moral Character", in S. Hampshire (ed.), *Public and Private Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973): pp. 55–73.

[33] *Utilitarianism, For and Against* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1973): 99. Further citations included parenthetically in the text. It is worth emphasizing here what will be significant later on: this objection hinges on a powerful moral intuition about the nature of moral responsibility.

words, it matters who burns the will: whatever Featherstone's machinations are, Mary is saying that she will have no part in them.

But as it happens, Mary's inaction ends up contributing to Fred's loss of money, a fact that she regrets: it "touches her close." And as Caleb explains, the problem is not one where Mary feels that she ought to have acted differently, but rather one where, in acting appropriately, someone was inadvertently hurt; it is as if "she had knocked down somebody's property" while "rightfully defending herself." Moral philosophers have recently developed an account of this feeling: as Rosalind Hursthouse notes, such feelings are the "moral remainder" of a violated obligation. Hursthouse explains the notion of moral remainder in terms of genuine moral dilemmas, where an agent faces two compelling but incompatible options:

> Then, whatever they do, they violate a moral requirement, and we expect them […] to register this in some way—by feeling distress or remorse or guilt, or, in some cases, by recognizing that some apology or restitution or compensation is called for. This—the remorse or regret, or the new requirement to apologize or whatever—is called the (moral) 'remainder' or 'residue.'[34]

We can thus think of Mary as having confronted a moral dilemma. She could either hurt Fred indirectly or violate her principle to stay out of Featherstone's maneuverings: more precisely, since Mary does not know for sure she would help Fred by burning the will, the dilemma is between a possible benefit to Fred and a certain violation of principle. It is what Hursthouse calls a "solvable" dilemma, insofar as there is no question that one option—the option Mary picked, of not getting involved—is the right one. But the question is whether

[34] *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999): 44.

the remaining option carries some moral force that, as Hursthouse notes, calls for "distress or remorse or guilt" or perhaps some "apology or restitution."

Are agents obligated to feel such remainder? Mrs. Garth gives what would be the Kantian or utilitarian answer in saying no: as she puts it, "loss which falls on another because we have done right is not to lie upon our conscience."[35] This is to say that Mary and Caleb (and presumably Hursthouse) are confused about moral dilemmas: what it means to resolve a dilemma is to find the action that is right, and if one does that action, there is nothing to regret. As Mrs. Garth notes, "Mary could not have acted otherwise," and thus the feelings she has are in some sense irrational. Caleb and Farebrother work out the response that Hursthouse would give, which is that Mary is better for her feelings. In Caleb's analogy, where someone accidentally kills a dog, one would be heartless to think that, because it was unavoidable, one need feel nothing; and Mr. Farebrother articulates the propositional content behind the analogy, pointing out that it would be odd to say Mary's feeling is mistaken, though it is not the sort of feeling that calls for any change in action on her part—as he suggests, it is not a feeling on which a man should make a claim.

Now, one could expand this reading of a moment in *Middlemarch* outward in a number of ways. Most locally, a critic could situate the three views expressed in this conversation in a reading of the rest of the novel, and determine which view of Mary's feelings the narrative stands behind.[36] One might connect this moment to other moral dilemmas in Eliot's fiction, and thus develop an analysis of how agents should deal with moral dilemmas generally in Eliot's *oeuvre*. More broadly, an interpreter might examine a wide

[35] For an explanation as to why utilitarian and Kantian accounts are committed to this view of moral dilemmas (as least in their simple versions) see Williams 101-106 and Hursthouse 48.
[36] As it happens, I am inclined to think the novel comes down pretty firmly on the Caleb/Farebrother side, but we need not resolve the question for my purposes here.

variety of moments where moral agents in Eliot make decisions, and analyze what proper practical rationality looks like for Eliot; I will do something like this in my first chapter.

Put shortly, each of these readings would regard *Middlemarch* as a philosophical text, developing an account of the novel's theoretical ethics as suggested implicitly in its form and explicitly in its discursive passages. Interpretively, moreover, each would rely importantly on paraphrases—sophisticated ones, of course, but nevertheless essentially prosaic renderings of a set of ideas developed through the progression of the novel—and thus see Eliot's fictional works as conveying a set of propositions fundamentally philosophical in nature. While such paraphrases would acknowledge and respond to the formal and aesthetic properties of the text, recognizing for instance that the interpreter should not regard Susan Garth's view as Eliot's own, those properties matter in such paraphrases primarily insofar as they contribute to the intellectual content of the novel. Sufficiently nuanced interpretive paraphrases will thus demonstrate a sort of "content formalism," attending to literary form insofar as it contributes to a fuller expression of the novel's ideas.

When readers attend to fiction in this way, a new way of thinking about narrative more generally starts to emerge. I will suggest here that the very nature of narrative form commits literary texts to a particular kind of claim: namely, propositions about agency, evaluation, intention, and the other peculiar features of subjectivity that the fields of moral psychology and moral philosophy more generally have tended to address. In particular, the act of telling a story involving characters and events at a certain level of complexity necessarily requires the depiction of decision, deliberation, and action. To the extent that authors depict such things, they develop theses about how such psychological processes work, and these theses have philosophical content. Moreover, when narrators reflect on the

actions and decisions of the characters in the novels in question, the text itself articulates the philosophical claims.

Explicating this theory of narrative, and the content formalist approach more generally, requires a response to several objections. First and most significant, there is the fact that since the "ethical turn," critics have devoted a great deal of sophisticated attention to the relationship between ethics and narrative, often in a deeply philosophical way, and thus the approach here needs to be differentiated from the work of critics like Martha Nussbaum and Adam Zachary Newton. It will be my suggestion that despite the many rich and substantive analyses that comprised the ethical turn, such critics have not emphasized the moral-philosophical content in literary narratives; in fact, they have dismissed precisely analyses that highlight such features of literary texts in favor of approaches that attribute ethical import to the sort of non-propositional knowledge Michael Wood and Gordon Graham champion.

To see this, and to get some sense as to why critics might so dismiss the intellectual content in literature, let me briefly summarize the broad movements in the "ethical turn," which involved the confluence of several trends in late twentieth-century thought.[37] The first trend, which one might call the "Aristotelian" thread and where the major figure was Martha Nussbaum, arose out of Anglo-American analytic moral philosophy and drew on works of literature—particularly the great Greek tragedies—to develop a neo-Aristotelian challenge to the dominant utilitarian and Kantian positions.[38] The second trend, which one might call the "Hegelian" thread and where the major figures are Richard Rorty, Charles Taylor, and

[37] The account I offer here of the history of the ethical turn largely parallels the standard interpretations. See Michael Eskin, "The Double 'Turn' to Ethics and Literature?" in *Poetics Today* 25.4 (Winter 2004): 557-572; and David Parker, *Ethics, Theory, and the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 1-43.
[38] See, most prominently, Nussbaum's *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986) and Bernard Williams's *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

Stanley Cavell, involved challenges to dominant "scientistic" epistemological and ontological models, arguing that "facts" are constituted by consciousness just in the same way "values" are, and it is a mistake to be any more skeptical of the latter than of the former.[39] Seeing the self and the world this way made literary texts a natural ally; as Michael Eskin notes, Rorty called in part for a "turn away from theory and towards narrative" (558).[40] A third trend, best thought of as a "Post-Structuralist" thread, depended on the re-thinking of ethics in the late works of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault.[41] This trend, perhaps because of the deep influence post-structuralism has had on contemporary literary criticism, was the first to generate book-length reconsiderations of the relationship between ethics and literature from those within the literary academy.[42] But of course, there had always been a few critics and

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[39] See especially Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979) and Taylor's *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992). But important here also would be the resurgence of neo-Hegelian thinkers (of whom Taylor is one) who argued for a conception of the self as grounded in and constituted by a community. I am thinking here of John McDowell, whose most developed work comes in his *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996). Also see Robert Brandom's *Tales of the Mighty Dead: Historical Essays on the Metaphysics of Intentionality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[40] It is perhaps worth mentioning that although these first two trends share some important concerns, they do not line up together without some tensions. Rorty has tended to disparage moral philosophy as not particularly compatible with a pragmatist framework, while Nussbaum does not have a great deal of sympathy with the epistemological and linguistic arguments that motivate the center of this argumentative trend. See, for instance, Nussbaum's retrospective claim that the "turning to philosophy represented by academic postmodernism was no help to the movement Ralph encouraged us to start, since the philosophy it focused on was metaphysical and epistemological, not ethical" ("Ralph Cohen" 764). Conversely, Rorty remarked in a 1995 interview that "it's hard to keep moral philosophy as an academic subdiscipline going if you're a pragmatist. The name of the game in moral philosophy is finding principles and then finding counter-examples to the other guy's principles. Pragmatists aren't very big on principles. There isn't much to do in moral philosophy if you're a pragmatist." *The Dualist* 2 (1995): 56-71, 65.

[41] *The Gift of Death* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996); *The Politics of Friendship* (New York: Verso, 1997). For Foucault, see *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990) and *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2001). Simon Critchley, in *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (New York: Blackwell, 1992) is generally recognized as among the first critics to describe the shift in deconstructive thought as a shift. Indeed, these turns correspond to arguments from commentators on both figures, particularly Critchley, Tobin Siebers, and Jürgen Habermas, who argued persuasively that the wholesale rejection of ethical claims was incoherent and that both Foucault and Derrida depended on ethical claims in ways they did not recognize. These various critiques are too detailed to adequately summarize here, but David Parker offers a concise and informed summary in his "The Turn to Ethics in the 1990s," in "Renegotiating Ethics: Essays Towards a New Ethical Criticism," *The Critical Review* 33 (special issue—1993), 3-15.

[42] J. Hillis Miller's *The Ethics of Reading* was perhaps the first treatment in this regard; Adam Zachary Newton's *Narrative Ethics* developed the Derrida's Levinasian insights a decade later J. Hillis Miller, *The Ethics of Reading*

philosophers resisting the trends of their fields, working on autochthonous projects along these lines.[43]

And since these initial arguments, there has been a genuine flowering in ethical criticism of all kinds.[44] Though it is perhaps obvious at this point, it is worth stressing the diversity of thought that falls under this rubric: neo-Aristotelian moral philosophers, Levinasian post-structuralists, and followers of Stanley Cavell perhaps form the core, but the "ethical turn" has grown large enough to incorporate thinkers from many traditions and backgrounds. As such, it would be a mistake to see the "ethical turn" as resulting from a shared research program; rather, there was a confluence between several relatively independent intellectual movements. Despite these differences, there is a key claim on which the canonical interpretations in the ethical turn depend. Eskin describes it well: it is the notion that what "is at stake in 'ethics' and literature" is "the singular encounter" between the reader and the text (560). In other words, ethical criticism has generally assumed that if there is something especially *ethically* interesting about literature, it is because of the peculiar relationship literary texts create with readers.

(New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); Adam Zachary Newton, *Narrative Ethics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997). Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

[43] In particular, Wayne Booth, in literary studies—whose 1988 monograph *The Company We Keep* is a central text in ethical criticism—had long been working on the rhetorical force of fiction; similarly, Stanley Cavell, in philosophy, had been thinking about the interrelationship of normativity and literature along Wittgensteinian lines; finally, Iris Murdoch—as both a moral philosopher and a novelist—crossed the boundaries between the fields for her entire life. See Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1969); and, for a nuanced discussion of Murdoch's thought, Maria Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human: the Moral Thought of Iris Murdoch* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[44] Lawrence Buell noted in 2000 that some fourteen hundred essays in "ethics-related literature scholarship" were published between 1981 and 1997, and the number has only increased since. Nussbaum herself noted in 2009 that the conditions which obtained in 1980 that made the notion of an ethical "turn" possible have all substantively changed, with many scholars turning to questions of "ethics and literature" ("Ralph Cohen" 757).

Eskin himself does not challenge this claim, but I want to suggest that it is worthy of interrogation, and that the ethical interest of literature may lie elsewhere.[45] The claim depends on a sense of the peculiarity of literary experience, of the sort Wood and Graham traced, and thus elides the potential ethical insight literary texts might offer in more ordinary terms. In other words, to move so quickly to posit the peculiarities of the encounter with the literary text as central misses the ways in which literature, and particularly narrative, is a kind of ethical thinking recognizably valuable in the same way as non-literary moral philosophy. The dismissal of this thinking emerges particularly clearly in the dispute between Wayne Booth and Adam Zachary Newton.

For Wayne Booth, the ethical value of a literary text depends on its implication of an "author," whose values the work under interpretation shares with the reader. The metaphor Booth lands on for this theory of reading is "friendship": the reader encounters the text and its implied author in the way we might meet a friend. As he puts it, "For our purposes, all stories […] can be viewed not as puzzles or even as games but as companions, friends—or […] as *gifts* from would-be friends."[46] On this view, then, the reader engages in a process of communal evaluation Booth calls "coduction" in the act of reading (70).[47] He offers an

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[45] This is in one sense broadly in line with those critics who have resisted the notion that aesthetic experience is ethically transformative. See Joshua Landy, "A Nation of Madame Bovarys: On the Possibility and Desirability of Moral Improvement through Fiction," *Art and Ethical Criticism*, ed. Gary Hagberg (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008): 63-94; and especially Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). Considering the claim that "empathy is at the heart in the novel," Keen asks provocatively in her preface if "the attractive and consoling case for fiction implied by these representative views" is "defensible." She continues: "Surveying the existing research on the consequences of reading, I find the case for altruism stemming from novel reading inconclusive at best and nearly always exaggerated in favor of the beneficial effects of novel reading" (vii). Although my analysis parallels neither Keen's or Landy's analyses behind this point, I am deeply sympathetic to their skepticism about the special effects of the encounter with features of literary aesthetics.

[46] Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 175. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

[47] Martha Nussbaum's work is broadly in sympathy with this way of thinking about the relationship readers have with literary texts: she argues that "good fiction" has a "way of making the reader a participant and a friend" (*Love's Knowledge* 46). More specifically, she suggests that literature—particularly the novel—engages readers in the kind of detailed imaginative experience of the life of others in a way that usefully develops the moral imagination. "The point is," she contends, "that in the activity of literary imagining we are led to imagine

example of this process in an extended reading of *Huckleberry Finn*, a book he initially admires; however, upon drawing out the "fixed norms" of the implied author, which include the belief that "Black people are […] so naturally good that the effects of slavery will not be discernible once slavery is removed" (467)—his coduction ultimately finds the text problematic.[48]

Adam Zachary Newton departs from Booth's claim that the moral value of fiction lies in the sharing of values by arguing that if fiction is ethically compelling, it is precisely because it is not transparently available to readers:

> By purposeful contrast, my proposal of a narrative ethics implies simply narrative *as* ethics: the ethical consequences of narrating story and fictionalizing person, and the reciprocal claims binding teller, listener, witness, and reader in that process. [Thus] the difference lies between readings which allegorize the [text's] events to a second-order story of translated meaning and those I will develop in ensuing chapters which attend exclusively to the shape, the drama, and the circumstances of [text's] own story, its strictly narrative details, since that story already reads, or allegorizes, itself. (11)

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and describe with greater precision, focusing our attention on each word, feeling each event more keenly—whereas much of actual life goes by without that heightened awareness" (47). This broadens life both "horizontally" and "vertically": literature introduces readers to people and places they would not otherwise meet and forces them to consider more deeply their everyday lives (48).

[48] There is not space to draw the point out here, but for all of the substantive ways in which James Phelan has challenged and revised Booth's understanding of the rhetorical function of literature and its ethical import, he remains committed to the notion that what ethics involves is primarily the conveying of values, and not of ideas. In *Narrative as Rhetoric* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1996), Phelan's interest in ethics and narrative largely rests on the way ethics can function to create narrative effect. Thus, for instance, he notes a passage in Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, where the narrator Frederic Henry remarks, about the soldiers in Italy, "only seven thousand died [of cholera]" (63). Here, "the discrepancy between Frederic and Hemingway arises not through any particular linguistic signal but rather through our awareness of the difference in values between them" (63-64). In other words, the passage shows Hemingway using ethics to rhetorical effect: the author shows a difference between himself and his narrator through the narrator's espousal of values which the audience knows the author does not share. As will become clear, it seems to me that the rhetorics of fiction could do more: they could see narratives as conveying and using moral ideas, along with deploying moral values.

Newton's point here is that previous critics have thought of the relationship between ethics and fiction as consisting in a two-step process: first, one interprets the text and establishes a meaning; and second, one evaluates it according to the basis of some criteria.[49] Though they might disagree about what these criteria should be, they share a conception about how ethical criticism ought to proceed. Newton contrasts this with his own way of reading, which will forgo the evaluative step in favor of a closer, more intimate reading, one that treats a text in the same way one encounters a person. As he goes on to put it, "It is the difference, to put it another way, between a deontology and a phenomenology […] One faces a text as one might face a person, having to confront the claims raised by that very immediacy, an immediacy of contact, not of meaning" (10-11).

Newton argues in particular that Booth's model of "friendship" depends on a view of reading as receiving a message from the author, which fails to sufficiently consider the way the reader is involved *prior* to the clear construction of the message. In his words, "acts of assent, surrender, seduction, coercion and bestowal all occur inside fictional texts; we must be a party to these, before we construe literary texts as messages sent from authors to readers" (65). And this is a version of a critique of philosophical ethical criticism made elsewhere: Simon Haines argues, for instance, that "even the most alert and well-intentioned of philosophers still read poems or novels as if they were containers or vehicles with

[49] Newton sees himself as departing from both Miller and Booth, but as his account develops, it becomes clear that he is much more sympathetic to Miller's deconstructive analysis. It is easy to see why: Miller argues that language itself places a demand on its listener or reader, and thus the ethical "moment is not a moment of response to a thematic content asserting this or that idea about morality," but rather "a much more fundamental 'I must' responding to the language of literature itself" *The Ethics of Reading* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 9-10. The claim here depends on the argument that texts are "unreadable"—they cannot and do not offer coherent positions or narratives, and resist our interpretive attempts to make them do so (120). Thus, the truly attentive reader recognizes this "law," which governs the text, and is appropriately responsive to it. Rather than forcing the text into an artificial consistency, the reader deconstructs it, looking for its tensions. Yet reading is "ethical," because when it is done correctly, it is still a response to a law. Even if Newton's analysis eventually diverges from this view, Miller's rejection of the ethical value of "thematic content" is quite in keeping with Newton's critique of "translated meaning," as is the notion of reading as ethical because it is a response to unreadability.

separable concepts inside them, or as if they were examples of re-formulable ideas," while David Parker suggests that "the ethical interest of imaginative literature is not then, as often implied, in ethical propositions that can be gleaned from it" ("The Turn to Ethics" 17).[50]

This criticism requires two responses. The first is that this kind of critique is not quite fair: if Booth, Nussbaum, and other philosophical literary critics arguably in practice do construe texts as expressing a message of "ethical propositions," this is not at any rate how they understand themselves. While Booth certainly holds that texts have values with some sort of content, he does not conceive of this simply as a message the text conveys to the reader—indeed, part of what makes friendship with a text so interesting is the way the text and the reader interact in producing the reading experience.

And to the extent that Booth does not in fact offer a view that reads literary texts for their "re-formulable ideas," it indicates a gap in the field. Thus, my second response would be that there is a place for an un-self-conscious version of the kind of criticism Newton dismises. Precisely because they do not wish to see narratives as just carrying a message, Booth and Nussbaum do not work out what it would mean for literary texts to do so. Although they appeal to ideas in narratives at various moments, these appeals are subsumed in the broader approach: if on their view the reading experience does in part include the grasp of some idea or set of ideas, this comprehension matters only as an element in an experience that cannot be understood in purely intellectual terms. Thus, although Booth recognizes that literary texts can have "profound intellectual import," he contends that the critic must understand these aspects as part of a text's "miraculous unity."[51] Similarly,

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[50] Simon Haines, "Deepening the Self: The Language of Ethics and the Language of Literature," in *Renegotiating Ethics in Literature, Philosophy, and Theory*, ed. Jane Adamson et al (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 21-38, 24.

[51] *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961): 112. Booth's example is Dostoevksy: "In *Crime and Punishment* we experience a wide variety of intellectual appeals. We are curious about the philosophical and religious and political battle between nihilism and relativism on the one hand and salvation on the other"

although Nussbaum suggests that Henry James's novels present "the best account I know" of a certain view of moral perception, she insists that her approach does not turn literary texts into "systematic treatises, ignoring in the process their formal features and their mysterious, various, and complex content." (*Love's Knowledge* 148; 29).[52] Both of these approaches thus preserve a sense, akin to Wood's, of the special features of literary experience, while simultaneously treating literary writers as important thinkers. To the extent that they remain committed to the importance of non-propositional knowledge, the analysis of what it means for a literary text to express propositional ideas goes under-developed.[53]

Thus, despite the richness of interpretations comprising the ethical turn, a review of its literature suggests that an approach that overtly reads literary texts for their moral philosophy remains undefended. But the broader content formalist approach is susceptible to three further important objections. The first is an anti-cognitivist aesthetic objection: drawn from various moments in the literature on philosophical aesthetics, this objection contends that it is a mistake to think that literature makes assertions or claims of any sort, since this is not the sort of thing that art does. The second is a philosophical rigor objection: one might perhaps grant that literary art does make philosophical claims in some fashion, but deny (outside of a few extraordinarily philosophical literary texts) that they have developed or argued for those claims in a way that gives them philosophical merit. The third objection, perhaps voiced by a historian of literary criticism, denies my broader position's novelty. Perhaps it is true that the critics in the ethical turn did not emphasize the moral-

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(134). However, Booth then goes on to link these "intellectual appeals" to our "qualitative and practical" interests as well—in the form of formal beauty and character identification.

[52] Nussbaum explains further: "It is, in fact, just this that we wish to preserve and to bring into philosophy. The very qualities that make the novels so unlike dogmatic abstract treatises are, for us, the source of their *philosophical* interest" (29).

[53] I would not want to say that this analysis is the only way to approach literary texts; there is no doubt that something interesting happens in the reading experience, and no doubt that literary texts do more than convey propositional content. But Newton and others seems to want a monopoly on ethical criticism. They insist that literature cannot have useful ethical insight merely as a message, and it is this insistence I want to resist.

philosophical content of literature, but critics in more general areas have long attended to the intellectual content of literature; content formalism might be new to the ethical turn, but it is not new in the wider world of literary theory. Each of these objections merits a careful response, since each potentially undermines my argument in a fundamental way. But more importantly, the responses to these worries offer important elaborations and clarifications of the view in a way that would be valuable in its own right. Let me then begin by considering the problem from philosophical aesthetics.

I. Defending Aesthetic Cognitivism

In his recent book, *The Cognitive Value of Philosophical Fiction*, the Finnish philosopher Jukka Mikkonen describes literary anti-cognitivism as the claim that "literary works do not have cognitive value and approaching them as knowledge-yielding works is an inappropriate stance toward them as works of literature."[54] He identifies a number of different arguments proponents of this claim have offered in support of it; several broad categories are discernible, including *aesthetic* arguments, *ontological* arguments, and *epistemological* arguments.[55] To start with the first, the aesthetic anti-cognitivist defends the positive claim that the essential characteristic of art generally is its formal structure; to make any of its other

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[54] *The Cognitive Value of Philosophical Fiction* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013): 11. Further citations included parenthetically in the text as *Cognitive Value*. Mikkonen in fact introduces a distinction between "strong" and "moderate" anti-cognitivism, but the distinction does not matter for my purposes here. This text is a revision and expansion of a number of Mikkonen's earlier essays, including two—"Implicit Assertions in Literary Fiction" and "Assertions in Literary Fiction"—that played a significant role in the article version of this introduction, "In Defense of Paraphrase." *New Literary History* 44.1 (Winter 2013): 117-139. I have updated the discussion here to address Mikkonen's refined view. For the earlier articles, see "Implicit Assertions in Literary Fiction," *Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics*, vol. 2 (2010): 312-330, hereafter cited as "Implicit Assertions"; and "Assertions in Literary Fiction," *Minerva—An Internet Journal of Philosophy* 13 (2009): 144-180, hereafter cited as "Assertions." This section in general is heavily indebted to Mikkonen's work.

[55] In "Assertions in Literary Fiction," Mikkonen identified eight different arguments for the anti-cognitivist position. In his more recent work, he has adopted the broad categories mentioned here and described the various subarguments under their headings (*Cognitive Value* 47). He includes a fourth category—"logical" arguments, which pertain to the kinds of support literary texts offer for their assertions—that I shall turn to in a later section.

features the central topic of analysis is to commit a kind of category error.[56] Noël Carroll summarizes the anti-cognitivist view thus:

> [A] literary work, construed as a work of art, is not esteemed for the learning it affords. That is something one can get from an encyclopedia, or from the kind of prosaic commentaries one finds in study guides, like those published by Barnes and Noble. Rather, one engages literature in order to undergo a literary experience, an aesthetic experience of a piece of writing as a work of art.[57]

Thus, the formalist argues, looking for the ideas or claims or knowledge in a literary text misses the point: to do so is akin to considering the thematic unity of a repair manual in mistaking the nature of the text in question.

As Carroll points out, however, this objection relies upon a reductionist fallacy. Developing a clever analogy, Carroll notes that every motor vehicle has in common "the intended capacity of locomotion under its own power" (31). However, this does not entail that the only way "to appreciate any motor vehicle is in terms of its capacity to locomote […] the ability to sustain mortar fire is pertinent when it comes to armored cars, but not family cars" (31). This is to say that since there are different categories of cars, different properties can become relevant in evaluating them depending on which category is in question. And one can say the same of aesthetic works: even if the only feature a novel shares with other forms of art is "form," critics can meaningfully assess it in terms particular

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[56] Peter Lamarque, one of the central proponents of this view, puts it thus: "We must not confuse contingent by-products of fiction or literature, however desirable they might be, with the very nature of the practices themselves." "Learning from Literature." In *A Sense of the World: Essays on Fiction, Narrative, and Knowledge*; ed. John Gibson et al (New York: Routledge, 2007): 13-23, 22.

[57] Noël Carroll, "Literary Realism, Recognition, and the Communication of Knowledge." In *A Sense of the World: Essays on Fiction, Narrative, and Knowledge*; ed. John Gibson et al (New York: Routledge, 2007): 24-42, 27. He explains further that we do this "by focusing on a formal feature of the work, such as its unity, and exploring it. For instance, one isolates the theme of a literary work, and then uses this concept in order to discern the way or ways in which the parts of the work cohere or hang together" (27). As we will see in a moment, this is an idea deeply indebted to New Critical ways of thinking about literature.

to its genre (33).[58] Thus, the literary critic might plausibly think that knowledge claims and assertions can be a valuable part of some artworks without committing himself to the claim that they are a valuable part of all art, in the same way that extensive armor is valuable to tanks without being relevant to our assessment of minivans.

This echoes a profound point that Wayne Booth often made about preferring pluralist concepts of the good over universalist aesthetic standards.[59] He argues:

> The search [for universal standards] stacks narratives in a single pyramid, with all of the candidates competing for a spot at the apex. Such an assumption, when applied rigorously, will always damn a large share of the world's most valuable art. I propose that we think instead […] of a botanical garden full of many beautiful species, each species implicitly bearing standards of excellence within its kind (56).

The point here is that it is a mistake to contend that critics ought to evaluate all aesthetic works with regards to a single uniform standard. Thus, in the defense of many differing "species" of aesthetic goodness, Booth offers a further theoretical background to the sort of evaluation on which the literary cognitivist relies. Carroll does not here dispute the formalist's claim that literary works are aesthetic insofar as they demonstrate certain structural features, but Booth's pluralism, by refusing the universal standard entirely, marks out a defense for literary cognitivism: it can be one of many "standards of excellence."[60]

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[58] This is particularly relevant for the realist novel, Carroll argues, because one of the central features of realism as a genre is a "commitment to the observation and clarification of social reality"; he footnotes vis a vis this claim Peter Brooks' *Realist Vision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). But as Mikkonen argues, cognitive claims are not unique to realism; he points out that "thesis novels," like William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, develops a claim that "is seen to comprehensively structure the story and to govern the plot" ("Literary Assertions" 146).

[59] Booth's most thorough articulation of critical pluralism occurs in *Critical Understanding: The Powers and Limits of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

[60] I am here sidestepping the complex debate about the "autonomy" of the aesthetic. One support the aesthetic anti-cognitivist would offer would be a defense of the notion that aesthetic experience is unique, and that art critics ought to develop and use only evaluative tools suited for such a realm of experience. Carroll explicitly rejects this position in favor a view he calls "moderate moralism"; see, among a number of essays explaining this position, "Art and Ethical Criticism: An Overview of Recent Directions of Research." *Ethics* 110.2 (January

But perhaps, the anti-cognitivist might argue, the problem is rather that literary cognitivists misunderstand the ontological status of literary fictions. Mikkonen usefully distinguishes three substrains of this objection. In his words:

> The argument maintains, first, that the fiction writer's mode of utterance differs from the assertive mode of utterance employed in everyday conversation: unlike speakers in everyday conversation, literary authors intend their assertions not to be believed but entertained, imagined, or made-believe by the readers. Second, the argument asserts that the author's fictive mode of utterance postulates a fictional speaker or narrator who speaks in the work, and hence, that assertions in a fiction cannot be attributed to the actual author […] Third, the argument proposes that fictive utterances do not refer to the actual but a fictional world. (*Cognitive Value* 50)

These objections move in a certain sense up the scale of skepticism. The first objection notes the difference between a conversational act and the act of reading; narrators and characters do not talk directly to readers of the texts they occur in, and thus readers ought not mistake them as making ordinary conversational assertions. The second objection takes this intuition further: certainly the characters in a narrative are fictional creations, but so are the narrator and even the implied author, and thus everything uttered within a literary narrative derives from a person who does not correspond with any real-world figure; thus, there is no one who is asserting the statements that occur within a literary text. Finally, the third objection points out that not only do the speakers not exist, the world they are talking about is fictional, and thus conclusions about it cannot apply to the world of the reader.

2000): 350-387, 377-379. Further citations included parenthetically in the text as "Ethical Criticism." Though he does not put it in quite these terms here, Booth fairly clearly also rejects the notion.

This final objection has been particularly well represented in the literature; Michael Riffaterre has termed it the "referential fallacy."[61] And it will not quite do to reply that many authors overtly intend to describe the real world, for two reasons. First, the fact that realist authors intend to describe the real world does not mean they succeed; it remains true that there is a difference between fictional narratives and nonfiction genres like journalism. It is not clear that literary authors can abrogate this difference simply by saying they intend to. Second, the narrative structure of decisions, persons, actions, and so forth that commit a text to claims in moral philosophy is common to texts that are not straightforwardly realistic. Thus, a more general answer to the ontological anti-cognitivist is necessary.

For this answer, I want to appeal to an older concept in literary criticism—the notion of literature as "analogous" to reality. This concept has a long tradition.[62] In an interesting feature of twentieth-century intellectual history, however, the most thorough recent analysis of this notion occurred within Soviet literary criticism, particularly in the work of Yuri Lotman, who developed an understanding of art as a "secondary modeling system."[63] Near the beginning of his 1967 essay "The Place of Art Among Other Modeling Systems," Lotman summarizes his view of art thus:

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[61] As Mikkonen notes, A.C. Bradley and Dorrit Cohn develop versions of it as well. See Mikkonen, "Assertions," 147; *Cognitive Value*, 50. A.C. Bradley, *Poetry for Poetry's Sake* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901). Dorrit Cohn, *The Distinction of Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

[62] It dates back at least to the American Renaissance, where we find the *Dial* critiquing Shelley for poetry that is insufficiently "analogous to reality." "Shelley," *The Dial* 1.4 (1841): 470-493. And later, Allen Tate, in an interesting essay of 1952, suggests his own conception of literature as an analogy to the real world through an interpretation of Edgar Allan Poe. See "The Angelic Imagination: Poe and the Power of Words." *The Kenyon Review* 14.3 (Summer, 1952): 455-475. I am guided to this understanding of Tate by George Core, who in 1969 suggested that for Tate, "We begin by looking at the actual world as the artistic imagination dramatically embodies it for us, and through the pressure of analogy the actual world and literature become one and 'achieve a dynamic and precarious unity of experience.'" "A Metaphysical Athletic: Allen Tate as Critic." *The Southern Literary Journal* 2.1 (Fall, 1969): 138-147, 141. And given how old the notion of "analogy" is, it seems likely that there are much older discussions than these.

[63] Lotman is the founder and perhaps most famous member of the Tartu School of Russian semiotics, a central incarnation of Russian structuralist criticism. See Janet Patterson's entry on the Tartu school in the *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory*, ed. Irene Makaryk (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993): 208-211.

> Art is always an analogue of reality (of an object), translated to the language of the given system. Therefore, a work of art is always conventional and, at the same time, must be intuitively recognized as an analogue of a certain object, that is, it must be "similar" and "dissimilar" at the same time. Emphasizing only one of these two inseparable aspects breaks the modeling function of art.[64]

Crucial here is the recognition that art cannot be completely representational of the sensory world: it is always in some way "dissimilar." But this dissimilarity is not complete; the art object is also always similar in some fashion to an aspect of the reader's world.[65] This is what it means to be an "analogue": the artistic system shares certain key features of the sensory world while marking itself as distinct from it. Lotman's argument suggests the way fictional narratives make assertions, for the claim that a fictional world is a meaningful analogue to the world of the reader is, in an important way, easier to demonstrate than the claim that a fictional world is an accurate representation or imitation of the readerly world. After all, in order to establish an analogy, it need only be the case that the two worlds share key features.

However, if an appeal to analogy offers a solution to the ontological versions of the anti-cognitivist thesis, this way of construing the cognitivist position is perhaps especially vulnerable to the final and perhaps most important category of arguments, the epistemological worries. The broad point such objections make is that artistic works are complex in such a way that they prevent readers from ever settling on one claim with the certainty that the work asserts it. As Mikkonen puts it, advocates of this view "stress the impossibility (or difficulty) of locating the author's assertions in their works"; the question is:

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[64] Yuri Lotman, "The Place of Art Among Other Modeling Systems." Trans. Tanel Pern. Sign Systems Studies 39.2.4 (2011): 249-270. I have rendered the spelling of the translation in the American idiom.

[65] In particular, what I will suggest later on is that the deliberative agency of literary characters in realist novels is often analogous to our own, while the specific problems they deliberate about are of course different. This, it seems to me, is what it is for characters to be "mimetic."

"how may the author's actual assertions be identified?" (*Cognitive Value* 54). And if I am correct that literature makes assertions by virtue of its analogies with the world, then the interpretive problem here is even larger. After all, the question of which features a fictional world shares with the real world is open to interpretive dispute, and the dispute hinges on the understanding of which connections a text means to assert. Thus, the solution to the ontological version of the objection is largely meaningless without an accompanying response to the epistemological version.

Mikkonen's own solution to this problem is to resurrect appeals to authorial intention; as he puts it, "philosophical assertions in fiction call for evaluation roughly akin to assertions in everyday conversation" (*Cognitive Value* 60). This "conversational approach" to literary cognitivism is, as Mikkonen explains, indebted to Noël Carroll, whose 1992 essay "Art, Intention, and Conversation" overtly rejected Wimsatt and Beardsley's famous "intentional fallacy." In particular, Carroll argues that the intentional fallacy depends upon a naïve view of intentions themselves: when one thinks of an "intention" as a discrete mental entity separable from and prior to the action that realizes it, then it begins to seem plausible that such a thing might be irrelevant to the understanding of a piece of literature. Philosophers of language after Wittgenstein, however, have come to reject this notion for other reasons, and instead construed intentions as inextricably bound up with speech-acts. This has significant ramifications for artistic criticism: "Searching for authorial intention is, consequently, not a matter of going outside the artwork, looking for some independent, private, mental episode […] The intention is evident in the work itself, and, insofar as the

intention is identified as the purposive structure of the work, the intention is the focus of our interest in and attention to the artwork."[66]

In Carroll's essay, this manifests in literary criticism in a willingness to see propositional statements in a text as asserted by the author. Although generally statements in a literary text will be *representations* of utterances rather than utterances themselves, there are exceptions:

> [There are] many parts of literary works that do not appear to be representations of illocutionary acts: the discourse on whales in Melville's *Moby Dick*, the history of symbols in Hugo's *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and the philosophy of history in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. Though housed in fiction, where they undeniably perform a literary function, they are also essays whose authors produced them in order to make assertions. (165)

And once the critic has acknowledged that some portions of a text might be statements intended by the author, Carroll thinks a broad new set of appeals to authorial intention become interpretively plausible: "For once we admit that there can be explicit nonfictional passages […] the door is opened to the recognition that there are many implicit or implied propositions in literary works as well" (166).

Mikkonen's version of this view, termed the "moderate propositional theory of literary truth," suggests that it is possible for utterances to occur in fiction that bear the mark of the author's intention, so to speak, in such a way that the audience can recognize and

[66] "Art, Intention, and Conversation." In *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 157-180, 160. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

contemplate the utterance as an assertion.[67] Central to this process is the audience's performance of a sort of double act; he explains that "literary suggestions" occur when:

> (i) the audience will recognize that the utterance is intended by the author to suggest a certain proposition.
>
> (ii) the audience recognizes that the author intends them both to imagine that suggested proposition (as a suggestion characterizing the fictional world) and to believe it;
>
> (iii) the audience both imagines the suggested proposition (as a suggestion characterizing the fictional world) and believes it; and, finally, that
>
> (iv) recognizing the author's invitation to such a response is (at least partly) a reason for the response. (80)

The project here is to specify the sort of conditions to which Carroll was presumably appealing.[68] In discursive portions of a text like the chapter on whales in *Moby-Dick*, the notion indicated in conditions I and IV explains that the author (i.e., Melville) intends a certain utterance to be taken as an assertion, and further that this intention is manifest in the text to the point where it is a reason for the reader understanding it as such. Conditions II and III indicate that the reader understands the passage in two ways: both as pertaining to the fictional world and as claims made about the world of the reader. He means this, I think, to address the issue of literary form; I shall return to this question in a moment.

It is impossible, Mikkonen thinks, to say in the abstract how it is that readers ought to recognize an author's invitation to consider an utterance as an assertion: as he somewhat regretfully notes, "There is no general rule […] to identify literary assertions" (59). But, he goes on to say, this worry need not doom the enterprise: "Some general guidelines may be sketched. In literary culture, authors manifest their assertions by the form and content of

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[67] As Mikkonen explains elsewhere, the strategy here derives from Paul Grice's conception of speaker assertion ("Implicit Assertions" 324).
[68] As Mikkonen explains elsewhere, this specification is essentially identical to Carroll's own theory of "films of presumptive assertion"; see "Assertions" 156.

their utterances, the tone and style of the narrative and the manner of representation, the design of the work, and the like" (59). And if this seems somewhat unsystematic, unclear, and not susceptible to articulation, surely the problem is equally true for ordinary conversations, and yet speakers manage to meaningfully assert things anyway.

Mikkonen's view has a certain air of bracing common sense. In the same way that ordinary conversational speakers rely on a set of unarticulated but nevertheless quite real conventions to make assertions, so readers can assess when literary utterances count as such by relying on something like the same thing. And certainly there are some aphoristic elements in fiction this account fits well. As Mikkonen somewhat impishly notes: "the literary institution cannot prevent authors from including assertions in their work" ("Literary Assertions" 149). But as a general account of how literary texts make claims, it has some significant limitations. First, it does not address the relation utterances within a text have between each other *as assertions*—that is, the way a formal structure emerges within a text from the relations between its individual assertions. Second, Mikkonen's view is dependent on someone within the text—a character or the narrator—uttering the assertion he wants to consider as such. As a result, it is not clear that he can account for assertions made by the formal structure of a narrative. Another way of putting this is to note a useful distinction he draws between implications made "by an utterance" and those "by the work": the difference is between "implicit assertions conveyed by isolated fictive utterances (a narrator's meditations on a philosophical topic, for example) and, more typically, implicit assertions conveyed by the complete work" (*Cognitive Value* 75). His model, fairly clearly, fits the former more than the latter.

This objection might sound like a surprising return of the formalist argument, and to a certain extent it is—I am critiquing Mikkonen for thinking that it is possible to know what

propositions a work asserts independently of an account of the entire work. But what I have in mind is the perhaps more ordinary formal structure of any theoretical text. Consider as an example Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*, which mentions at one point the possibility that God might be systematically deceiving everyone.[69] Does it make sense to say that the text asserts this—that the *Meditations* claims that "God might have brought it about that we make systematic logical errors and don't notice?" In one respect, yes. This is a key part of Descartes' argument, and Descartes does see this as a genuine worry. However, in another respect, it is not appropriate to say that the *Meditations* claims this at all, because the text goes on to subsume this moment as part of its larger argument: Descartes shows that we cannot doubt our own existence, and from this certainty he goes on to show that we can trust our "clear and distinct perceptions."[70] Now this might seem to be a problem of oversimplification, but it is not, really: the statement "the *Meditations* asserts that we cannot doubt our own existence" would be more appropriate, though it is equally simple. Rather, the problem is one of not recognizing the overall theoretical position the text articulates.

Mikkonen is, I think, aware of this worry. He suggests at a number of moments that attention to the formal structure of a literary work is necessary to know whether the reader ought to regard an utterance as an assertion; indeed, the "moderate" in the "moderate propositional theory" is supposed to indicate that his view "does not treat propositions in literature as isolated propositions that could be extracted from the work and applied as they are but as elements of the fictional narrative" (13).[71] But at other moments—perhaps in

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[69] As Descartes remarks, "how do I know that God has not brought it about that I too go wrong every time I add two and three or count the sides of a square, or in some simpler matter, if that is imaginable?" *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Ed. John Cottingham. Trans. John Cottingham (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 14.

[70] See the Third Meditation, particularly 30-31.

[71] Other examples of this attitude include his reference to the "design of the work" as one of the features that makes an utterance an assertion (*Cognitive Value* 59) and his suggestion that an "author's point should be formed as a synthesis or combination of the particular views" of the characters (*Cognitive Value* 72).

keeping with Carroll's suggestion—he implies that a reader can know just by reading a single passage that the author means to assert it. Thus he claims Borges's line, "It may be said that universal history is the history of a handful of metaphors," clearly "invites" the reader to "entertain" it as an asserted thought, because [it is] in the indicative form and [it] concerns general, broadly philosophical issues" (59). And it is these two separate modes of consideration—with regards to the fictional narrative on the one hand, and with regard to general truth on the other—that he means to bring together in his notion that readers "imagine" some "suggested proposition (as a suggestion characterizing the fictional world)" and "believe it." As he puts it elsewhere, fictive utterances can be "dual layered": they "function on two levels," as "assertions of the fictional world, and assertions of reality"(54).

Understanding literary form by suggesting statements have meanings in two different registers is problematic. First, as Mikkonen recognizes at one point, it seems odd to suggest that such utterances can be broken into two separate statements (59). Moreover, since presumably a statement's claim about reality depends upon its connection to the rest of the fictional work—in other words, to know whether an utterance is asserted by a fiction, one must develop an interpretation of the entire work—it is not clear that the distinction between the two levels is ultimately ever discernible. If critics must always first treat an utterance with regards to the fictional narrative, and its reference to reality depends upon its connection to that narrative, then the reference any given utterance by itself has to reality depends entirely on the connection the work as a whole has to reality. And this points to a further issue: Mikkonen seems to be thinking about literary assertion from the point of view of the reader, encountering utterances for the first time. Surely, however, the question of literary assertion is an interpretive question, rather than an issue in reader phenomenology. It does not seem to me that readers understand assertions in texts the way speakers do

assertions in conversation; they need to finish reading a text before they can see what it asserts, whereas speakers can recognize assertions as such at most points within a conversation.

Perhaps it is possible to overcome these objections. But I am inclined to suggest an alternative, keeping in mind the suggestion that there is something special about the overt propositional claims in literature. Mikkonen, and the analytic tradition within which he is working, address the question of literary assertion from what one might call a "top-down" approach: starting with a model of how assertions work generally, they try to fit the account to the special category of literary assertions. Aside from the specific objections I have laid out so far, there is the additional point that "no general rule" for trying to decide whether a given utterance is in fact asserted by the author can result from this approach (118). Since the goal is to develop an account that covers all possible literary assertions, Mikkonen pitches his claims at such a high level of abstraction that they are largely useless in determining interpretive methodology.

Here, I want to see how far one can get with a "bottom-up" approach, starting with ideas as they actually arise in literary texts, rather than with the abstract notion of an assertion. Although a universally applicable theory will thus not follow, nevertheless some generalizations about the manner in which ideas become central to a literary work are possible. Moreover, at the risk of philosophical naiveté, I also hope to avoid an aspect of the argument on which Mikkonen spends a great deal of time. Perhaps as a result of his inheritance of the analytic tradition, much depends in his account on the right way to categorize the ideas put forward in literary texts: whether they are "asserted," "implied,"

merely "suggested," or perhaps "entertained."[72] Such distinctions presumably matter a great deal to philosophers of language, but they strike me as largely irrelevant for the literary critic and even for the philosopher of art. The interpretive question is whether the evidence of the text warrants a given paraphrase of its intellectual content, and whether this is because the text "implied" or merely "suggested" such content does not matter so long as the paraphrase is persuasive.

In particular, if we focus on one particular kind of literature—realist narratives—a particular kind of idea emerges as central to its structure. Scholars have long recognized that one of the classic elements of narrative is "mimetic" character: that is, the creation of fictional persons who nevertheless represent characteristics of real people.[73] One recent critic has deemed this element of narrative the "referential aspect" of characters—the fact that they are mean to resemble human beings.[74] In so doing, authors depict mental states in addition to physical ones, and while sometimes their knowledge of mentality stems from scholarly discourse, much more commonly it is the result of what philosophers call "folk psychology": the term encapsulates what we know at an implicit level about the nature of mentality and human subjectivity simply by being a competent speaker of a language, which includes terms for such phenomena.[75] As such, it serves an important practical role: as

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[72] He lays out his theory of literary suggestion at the end of chapter 2, pp 73-98. Though I shall henceforward occasionally speak of text's assertions, the reader should keep in mind that this is a term of convenience, not the more precise philosophical notion.

[73] See James Phelan's "Character, Progression, and the Mimetic-Didactic Distinction" for an explanation of this term and for a sense of the debates about it. *Modern Philology* 84.3 (February 1987): 282-299.

[74] Alexander Woloch, *The One vs. The Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003): 15.

[75] Daniel Dennett explains it thus: "Since the terms 'belief' and 'desire' and their kin are parts of ordinary language, like 'magnet,' rather than technical [scientific] terms like 'valence,' we must first look to 'folk psychology' to see what kind of things we are being asked to explain. *What do we learn beliefs are when we learn how to use the words 'believe' and belief'?* The first point to make is that we do not really learn what beliefs are when we learn how to use these words. Certainly no one *tells us* what beliefs are, or if someone does, or if we happen to speculate on the topic on our own, the answer we come to, wise or foolish, will figure only weakly in our habits of though about what people believe. We learn to *use* folk psychology—as a vernacular social technology, a craft—but we don't learn it self-consciously as a theory—we learn no meta-theory with the theory—and in this

Daniel Dennett notes, "we use folk psychology all the time, to explain and predict each other's behavior" (41).

Let me offer an example. In E.M. Forster's example of a simple plot, "The king died, and then the queen died of grief," there is an implicit psychological claim made through the character of the queen: namely, that the overpowering sadness of grief can kill the person feeling it. [76] There is no reason to think Forster came to this conclusion after detailed psychological research. Instead, it represents a belief about human emotions that stems from an understanding of the concepts speakers of English use to describe such psychological elements. The sentence does not openly articulate this idea, but it nevertheless clearly implies the claim: this is to say that it relies on a folk-psychological understanding of love and sadness without bringing that understanding to the level of reflective awareness.

But of course, authors often do reflect on the folk psychology on which they rely. They do so in at least two broadly recognizable ways. First, novels often showed repeated instances of the operation of a psychological feature in their emplotment of a character. One might think here of a slightly longer version of Forster's story, where several characters suffer from grief. Such instances can show the centrality of a given claim: a story where several characters die of sadness is much more clearly about the psychological effects of grief than a story where only one does. Similarly, they can develop an analysis of the claim through variations: a story where two characters experience grief with different outcomes—say, one dies and the other does not—will suggest a complexity to the operation of the psychological feature. Other features of the characters—perhaps the character who died of grief repressed other emotions, while the character who survived was more emotionally

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regard our knowledge of folk psychology is like our knowledge of the grammar of our native tongue." "Three kinds of Intentional Psychology," reprinted in *Reduction, Time and Reality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981): 39-40. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

[76] *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: RosettaBooks, 2010): 61. Electronic.

expressive—can explain the differences, and thus develop the claim further. And finally, sometimes the repetitions will be caught up in plot events that suggest evaluative stances: particularly at the end of a novel, a character's outcome in the plot can reflect an attitude the book takes as a whole towards some element of the character's psychology.

Noël Carroll defends a very similar understanding of the role of plot in narrative. He writes:

> The novel deploys a structure […] that we might call the virtue wheel or virtue tableau. A virtue wheel or virtue tableau comprises a studied array of characters who both correspond and contrast with each other along the dimensions of a certain virtue or package of virtues […] In this way, a virtue wheel is a comparable structure to the studied, polarized array of contrasts found in philosophical thought experiments […] that by systematically varying possible contributing factors enable us to identify various conceptual dependencies and other relations.[77]

Philosophical thought experiments, as commonly understood, are intuition-pumps: philosophers use such short stories to elicit the folk-psychological claims their readers accept but do not consciously recognize. One way of understanding a narrative, correspondingly, is as a set of thought experiments set alongside each other. As Carroll suggests, one way philosophers make claims is by varying contributing factors within the thought experiment to "identify various conceptual dependencies"; this is the sort of complexity in a psychological analysis that can emerge from the repeated depiction of a mental feature. Carroll emphasizes the way such structures make claims about virtues, but in fact the pattern of repetition and variation he is describing permits claims about many more topics.

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[77] Noël Carrol, "The Wheel of Virtue: Art, Literature, and Moral Knowledge." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 60.1 (Winter 2002): 3-26, 12. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

Such patterns by themselves, nevertheless, will often seem too vague to admit of persuasive paraphrase of their intellectual content unless they are accompanied by a third element—overt, propositional reflections on the part of the characters and the narrator. It is in this way that the reflective utterances Mikkonen emphasizes matter for the literary critic: whether the reader in fact contemplates them as bearing both on the fictional world and the real world, whether they are "suggestions," "implications," or "assertions," it is straightforwardly clear that they often bring the folk-psychological ideas implicit in the representations of the characters and in the sequences of the plot to a level of reflective awareness. Such passages thus serve as crucial guides to the patterns created by the development of the characters, specifying how to understand the theoretical implications of a plot event.

It is thus possible to redefine three of the central elements of stories—character, plot, and narrative discourse—in an epistemological fashion, describing each as a technique for the expression of intellectual content. The product, moreover, will be philosophy: at their heart, philosophical theories of agency are nothing other than articulated and systematized folk psychology.[78] Now, certainly, such theoretical claims only emerge at a certain level of narrative complexity: Forster's narrative relies on folk psychology without claiming anything about it, and recent narratologists have argued that even simpler narratives than his are possible.[79] One would also want to qualify the view by admitting that the features described here are not *necessary* for a novel to offer a view recognizable as philosophy; there are a

[78] There is a complex debate about the role of folk psychology in philosophical method, and this claim about its methodology is in some ways controversial. I shall return to this question at the end of Interlude II.
[79] See for instance, David Velleman's "Narrative as Explanation." *The Philosophical Review* 112.1 (January 2003): 1-25, 2. Velleman argues that Forster's example of a plot fits the Aristotelian conception of narrative in describing one event as bearing a causal relationship to another; this relationship is precisely what is missing in "The King died and then the queen died," Forster's example of a "story." This simply conveys two events in a temporal sequence. But it is not hard to challenge this view: Velleman argues that any sequence of events can be a narrative if it provides a suitable "emotional cadence" (6).

number of ways of writing novels of ideas. However, they are *sufficient* conditions: any novel that offers a series of repeated similar actions, when coupled with a narrator and characters who reflect upon the events involved in such a way that the plot events bear upon their reflections, will generate a recognizable set of assertions in moral psychology and philosophy. Correspondingly, it seems to me that critics cannot plausibly engage the philosophical claims in a novel with these features unless they account for this structure.

In recent years, some of the most thoroughly analyzed folk-psychological intuitions have pertained to moral responsibility. Philosophers have used such intuitions to investigate, for example, whether agents require multiple possible alternatives to be held responsible for choosing any one action (as it turns out, they don't—the relevant question is whether the agent identified with the action, not whether there was a real alternative) and whether attributions of responsibility are morally-laden (as it turns out, they are—we blame agents for unintended negative consequences but don't praise them for unintended positive consequences).[80] Questions of responsibility are similarly central to a number of nineteenth-century novels, and thus a brief discussion of moral responsibility in one such novel—George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*—usefully exemplifies the interpretive methodology I am recommending. Moreover, since critics have long recognized the centrality of this issue to Eliot's novel, it is possible to see the techniques I have described in use in literary criticism.

[80] The first argument is Harry Frankfurt's; he imagines a scenario where a man is considering whether to commit a crime. Unbeknownst to him, a second man will force him to commit the crime if he decides not to do so on his own; since our intuitions suggest the first man will be fully responsible if he decides to commit the crime, Frankfurt argues that alternate possibilities are not in fact essential for moral responsibility. "Alternate Possibilites and Moral Responsibility." *The Journal of Philosophy,* 66.23 (Dec. 4, 1969): 829-839. The second argument is Joshua Knobe's. He imagines two scenarios: in the first, a CEO is told a business decision will have adverse environmental consequences, and replies "I don't care, just do it"; in the second, a CEO is told a business decision will have positive environmental consequences, and replies "I don't care, just do it." Since our intuitions are that the CEO should be blamed in the first scenario but not praised in the second, Knobe argues that our attributions of responsibility depend on the moral qualities of the action in question. "The Concept of Intentional Action: A Case Study in the Uses of Folk Psychology." *Philosophical Studies* (2006): 203-231. Knobe thinks this is a problem for the use of folk psychology; I shall return to this issue in Interlude II.

This points to a fact worth emphasizing: in many ways, content formalism is just a slight re-description of a set of practices already widely used.

The question of responsibility appears very early in the book, when Tom Tulliver returns home to find that his sister Maggie has let his pet rabbits die. Blaming Maggie for the situation—he reminds her, "I told you to go and see the rabbits every day"—Tom's actions introduce an implicit claim: agents can be held responsible for that which they have promised to do. But Maggie's reflections on this same scene complicates matters: recognizing she should have remembered them, she asks rhetorically, "but how could I, when they did not come into my head?" (34). Since she did not deliberately let the rabbits die but simply forgot about them, Maggie implies, Tom should not hold her responsible. Moreover, the passage challenges to a certain extent the theory of agency the act of promising implies; as Vanessa Ryan has recently pointed out, "Maggie experiences her own actions as if they took place independently of active will or intention."[81]

Patterns that repeat and vary the elements involved here emerge. As Melissa Ganz has noted, there are a series of promises throughout the novel, and two different views about how promises obligate agents materialize: there is "a narrow, self-regarding view, embraced by Mr. Tulliver and Tom, and an expansive, other-regarding view, espoused by Maggie."[82] Similarly, the question of responsibility through omission—whether agents are responsible for acts they did not choose but instead in some fashion permitted to happen—returns in the novel's climax, when Maggie elopes with Stephen Guest by drifting, literally and figuratively, down a river. The town of St. Ogg's holds Maggie fully responsible. As George Levine puts it, it is as if she had, "at the moment when the choice was necessary,

[81] Vanessa Ryan, *Thinking without Thinking in the Victorian Novel*, 65.
[82] Melissa J. Ganz. "Binding the Will: George Eliot and the Practice of Promising." *ELH* 75.3 (Fall 2008): 565-602, 571.

balanced the alternatives carefully."[83] But the novel itself recognizes the limitations of this view of responsibility, a stance it embodies in characters like Maggie's mother, who does not hold Maggie blameworthy, and in passages from the narrator, who famously remarks that the "men of maxims" who condemn Maggie fail to attend "to the special circumstances that mark the individual lot" (517).

The point here is not to draw out the account of responsibility in *The Mill on the Floss*. Nor is it to suggest that such an account is easy to deduce. Indeed, the significant differences in the critics just discussed—Ryan sees Eliot as engaging scientific debates about consciousness, Ganz reads her against a background of legal thinking about contracts, and Levine's Eliot addresses the philosophical issue of determinism—suggest the possible complexities. Rather, the point is to indicate the extent to which there is already critical acceptance of the interpretive techniques that an emphasis on folk psychology would involve.

I hope thus to have shown that it is possible to meet the anti-cognitivist's challenge: that although there are a variety of reasons to think that literary narratives are not the sorts of things that make assertions, a sufficiently nuanced account of their structural nature, when combined with a recognition of the plurality of aesthetic goods and an understanding of the analogous relationship between fictional worlds and the world of the reader, reveals the way in which such narratives are often committed to the development of certain ideas. Moreover, the redescription of narrative elements in terms of folk psychology points to the way in which the ideas developed by narratives are often essentially moral philosophy. One might point out, however, that philosophers usually accompany their views with arguments, and that fiction does not usually do this. In the next section, I will try to resolve this problem.

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[83] George Levine, "Determinism and Responsibility in the Works of George Eliot." *PMLA* 77.3 (June 1962): 268-279, 276.

II. Novels and Arguments

One of the objections to aesthetic cognitivism that both Carroll and Mikkonen consider is what they term the "no-argument argument." As Carroll summarizes it, the objection "maintains that even if artworks contained or implied general truths, neither the artworks themselves nor the critical discourse that surrounds them engages in argument, analysis, and debate in defense of the alleged truths" ("Wheel of Virtue" 6). In other words, even if one grants to the cognitivist that literary texts do in fact make assertions with philosophical content, their lack of supporting argumentation for these assertions makes it interpretively mistaken to engage with such assertions philosophically.

In responding to this worry, two initial distinctions are worth making. First, one common response is to suggest that literary texts engage in the production of a different kind of knowledge than other discursive texts: while readers may accept a given claim conceptually, they do not understand it phenomenologically. Thus, while they do not support their claims argumentatively, there is no need to do so, because this is not the nature of the kind of knowledge they provide. "By providing richly particularized episodes," Carroll explains, "the novelist gives the reader a 'feel,'" which usefully supplements some set of propositional claims ("Ethical Criticism" 362). As Carroll goes on to note, however, "one would appreciate hearing a lot more than is currently available in the literature about the nature" of this kind of knowledge; put succinctly, the sort of imaginative "acquaintance" knowledge invoked here has not received the sort of clear articulation necessary to make a reliable response to the "no argument" objection (363). Moreover, the response ultimately dismisses the profound thinking in literature as subordinate to the experience it creates, and thus does not fit the version of literary cognitivism defended here.

Second, it is possible to dismiss one version of the objection relatively easily. A close variant is what Mikkonen and Carroll call the "no-evidence" argument, which maintains—in Mikkonen's gloss—that "since the fictional scenarios considered as case studies are made up," any assertions literary texts make require validation through "referring to some extra-fictional source" (*Cognitive Value* 86). Perhaps this is a genuine worry if one is interested in discursive fields like history, but it is not clear to me that it makes sense to think of philosophers as providing evidence-verified knowledge of a scientific sort at all. Moral philosophers make claims, take positions, and develop accounts, all of which can be more or less persuasive, but even the most widely accepted philosophical positions are just that—widely accepted, rather than "known." When they are widely accepted, moreover, it is not because they are the best explanations of the evidence, but because philosophers tend to accept the arguments in support of such views. Thus, if the goal is to demonstrate that the intellectual content in literary works merits the same status as that in more traditional philosophical texts, the lack of evidence seems untroubling.

This is the impulse behind Carroll's own solution to the "no-argument" objection. He writes:

> It is extremely peculiar that philosophers should raise these particular objections against literature, since philosophy employs a gamut of techniques to produce knowledge and learning that are analogous to those found in literature. What I have in mind here specifically are thought experiments, examples, and counter examples that are often narrative and generally fictional in nature. Such devices are frequently employed by philosophers to defend and/or motivate their claims, moral and otherwise. ("Wheel of Virtue" 7).

As Martin Warner among others has noted, the notion that philosophy proceeds only via logically valid deduction from obviously true axioms is dubious, and has been for some time; as he rather delicately puts it, "the geometric model for philosophy is at best but partial."[84] And as Carroll suggests, this model has always been aspirational—in practice philosophers rely on a whole host of argumentative strategies, and commonly invoke the folk psychology of readers in ways essentially identical to literary narrative.

This touches on broad issues in epistemology that are beyond the scope of this project, but let me briefly say something about this account of philosophical argument. Certainly "continental" philosophers have for some time recognized analyses of the philosophical project that do not conceive of it as only the development of deductively valid arguments for particular claims. As Gilles Deleuze contends in his final book, *What is Philosophy?*, "logic is reductionist not accidentally but essentially"; as a methodology constitutive of philosophy, then, it cannot account for the way philosophy serves as means for the "creation of concepts," which in Deleuze's mind is the true "beginning of philosophy.[85] Tzachi Zamir has recently made a similar point, trying to distinguish non-deductive forms of argumentation that are nevertheless still reflective of norms of rationality.[86] He writes:

> Opting to choose argumentative principles that cannot accommodate [non-deductively derived rational beliefs] is to endorse a mode of philosophizing that is both limiting and limited. Broadening the intellectual range to which philosophical methodology should be sensitive involves accepting argumentative means that do

[84] Martin Warner, "Literature, Truth, and Logic." *Philosophy* 74 (1999): 29-54, 36. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.
[85] *What is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996): 135; 41.
[86] "An Epistemological Basis for Linking Philosophy and Literature" *Metaphilosophy* 33.3 (April 2002): 321-336.

> not conclusively demonstrate a claim but rather make it plausible, support it to a certain degree (326).

The point here is that once one broadens the notion of the sorts of arguments philosophers actually use, then the notion that there are no arguments in literary texts begins to seem more dubious. Such texts will not demonstrate their claims geometrically, but this does not mean they offer no rational support for their positions: as Zamir suggests, rationality is broader than deduction.

Two particular kinds of rational support are in fact common. In his recent *Reason and Philosophy*, Robert Brandom spells out a model of the philosophical project that has "as a central element the explication of concepts."[87] The "point of explicating concepts," Brandom explains, is to open "them up to rational *criticism*" (114). He writes: "The rational enterprise, the practice of giving and asking for reasons that lies at the heart of discursive activity, requires not only criticizing *beliefs*, as false or unwarranted, but also criticizing *concepts*. Defective concepts distort our thought and constrain us by limiting the propositions and plans we can entertain as candidates for endorsement in belief and intention" (114) Philosophy can in particular usefully critique the "defective inferences" of—for instance—pejorative concepts: "So long as the commitment to the propriety of the inference from German nationality to barbarity and unusual cruelty remains merely implicit in the use of terms such as 'Boche,' it is hidden from rational scrutiny." However, when philosophers make it explicit "in the form of the conditional claim 'Anyone who is German is barbarous and unusually prone to cruelty,' it is subject to rational challenge and assessment; it can, for instance, be confronted with such counterexamples as Bach and Goethe" (125).

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[87] *Reason in Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009): 114. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

The intellectual work Brandom describes here is central to a number of great socially realist novels. Examples are not difficult to come by, but some that are particularly obvious would be the many great novels chronicling the experience of African-Americans. Novels like Richard Wright's *Native Son* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, among many others, confront and refute a number of the racially charged concepts audiences might bring to them. In the Victorian period, one might cite in a similar strain Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*, which, as James Adams notes, seemed to call into question "all the pieties of gender."[88]

A second kind of support novels offer for their assertions, however, will be more relevant for my project here. Critics have long recognized "coherence" as an aesthetic term: the idea that the elements of an aesthetic text ought to fit with each other to create a single effect is an old idea in formalist criticism, with adherents including Theodor Adorno and Cleanth Brooks.[89] But the intellectual coherence that comes with this achievement—that is, when a literary text connects its various claims into a single position, as a part of combining all of its elements into a single product—lends philosophical support to its claims. To return briefly to *Middlemarch*, over the course of the novel Eliot advances claims about moral responsibility, moral deliberation, moral psychology, the freedom of the will, political life, the history of religion, and biological science—and these are just a few of its more obvious intellectual registers. If Eliot successfully integrates all of these views into a position where

[88] James Eli Adams, *A History of Victorian Literature* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012): 370.
[89] Adorno speaks in particular of the "inner consistency" of artworks. *Aesthetic Theory*, Ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann. Trans. Christian Lenhardt (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 10. Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, in a discussion I will turn to more extensively in a moment, suggest that "the truth of fiction involves such matters as "(1) the *consistency* and *comprehensibility* of character; (2) the motivation and *credibility* of action; and (3) the *acceptability* of the total meaning. The terms in italics imply an inner consistency or coherence rather truth of correspondence to outside facts." *Understanding Fiction* (New York: Appleton et al, 1943).

none contradict each other and some follow logically from others, this unity alone lends support to each claim, regardless of further argumentation.

III. Literary Criticism and Narrative Ideas

To see the innovation in, as well as the predecessors for and allies of, this way of thinking about literary narratives, I want to situate my account within a brief history of the theory of the novel in the twentieth century. Although the major movements in this analysis decisively rejected the validity of literary cognitivism, we can draw out a minor strain of criticism that has refused to dismiss the intellectual import of literary texts, and see the argument here as a descendant of such views. This strain emerges first during the beginnings of modern narrative theory at the end of the nineteenth century, in the transition from the novelistic art of George Eliot to that of Henry James.

In *The Anthology and The Rise of the Novel*, Leah Price points out that the practice of extracting propositional knowledge, in the form of aphorisms, was a popular way of understanding Eliot's works.[90] Price notes further that Eliot was of two minds about this sort of adulation. On the one hand, Eliot compliments one anthologist thus: "you know what I mean, and care the most for those elements in my writing which I myself care the most for" (134). On the other hand, Eliot had deep reservations about the violations of her narrative form, complaining of readers who "cut" *Daniel Deronda* "into scraps [...] I meant everything in the book to be related to everything else there" (131). This implies both an ending and a beginning: just as Eliot gave the novel the moral and theoretical sophistication Victorian anthologists required, making narrative extraction possible, she also articulated a

[90] This is exemplified most clearly by Alexander Main's volume of *Wise, Witty, and Tender Sayings in Prose and Verse Selected from the Works of George Eliot.* See Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 106. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

worry about the importance of narrative form as an aesthetic element—which, properly attended to, made extracting impossible.

I take this suggestion to be in line with Price's account. She contends that the sort of extractable "didactic digressions" characteristic of Eliot became associated in the English fiction of the 1890's "with a feminine moralism opposed at once to the narrative pleasure of masculine romance like Stevenson's or Kipling's and to the avant-garde doctrine of art for art's sake." (153). But there is room here for a distinction Price does not make. The worry about extraction represents at least three versions of a claim in aesthetics: first, as Eliot's reservations suggest, it is simply a worry about dismissing narrative complexity. Second, it is a worry about a reliance on moralistic evaluation that refuses to value formal sophistication, and certainly this aspect of the "art for art's sake" view played a central role in the development of British aestheticism.[91] But third, it is a worry about the novel's epistemological features: as Price notes, one of Eliot's reviewers asserted that "a novel ceases to be a novel when it aims at philosophical teaching. It is not the vehicle for conveying knowledge. Its business is to amuse" (151).

Now, this represents an importantly different worry than those about complexity and moralism: it instead objects to the notion that literary narratives make assertions worthy of genuine consideration. In the process of ensuring that the critic did not extract pieces of narratives unjustifiably or treat narratives moralistically, a powerful strain of literary criticism over the course of the next two generations—one which culminated in the New Criticism—came to widely adopt literary anti-cognitivism, and thus accepted the validity of the third objection. It seems to me that there was a missed opportunity here, insofar as content

[91] Oscar Wilde famously articulates this version of the claim in the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, where he remarks, "There is no such thing as a moral or immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all." *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Ed. Michael Patrick Gillespie (New York: Norton, 2006).

formalism, or a style of interpretation that avoided unsophisticated extraction and condemnatory moralism but allowed for the possibility that literature could convey sophisticated theoretical positions, was eliminated almost by accident.

Henry James's work on the theory of the novel is a central step in this process, developed in part as a criticism of Eliot. As he writes in "Daniel Deronda: A Conversation," "What can be drearier than a novel where the function of the hero […] is to give didactic advice?"[92] The problem, James notes, is that such didacticism disrupts the "current" of the story and renders it into a series of fragments (105). The idea here, which emphasizes the importance of aesthetic coherence, would form a central part of "The Art of Fiction," where James writes: "the idea, the starting-point, of the novel" is the only feature that can be thought of as "something different from its organic whole; and […] in proportion as the work is successful, the idea permeates and penetrates it, informs and animates it, so that every word and every punctuation-point contribute directly to the expression."[93] What James emphasizes here is the necessity of a singular coherence for the "organic whole" of the aesthetic object.[94] And what the Jamesian novelist does is attempt to render every element of the story in harmony with that "idea," so that it "permeates and penetrates" all the parts of the novel in such a way that everything contributes to the idea's expression. James has in mind something very much like aesthetic unity—the creation of a clear pattern that governs

[92] "*Daniel Deronda*: A Conversation," *Atlantic Monthly* (December 1876). Cited in Price 146.
[93] Henry James and Walter Besant, *The Art of Fiction* (Boston: Cupples and co., 1885): 76. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.
[94] There is admittedly a certain irony in claiming that this passage alludes to an important moment in the dismissal of textual ideas from literary criticism, given that James so overtly claims that it is the "expression" of an "idea" in a novel that matters. But as will soon become clear, the Jamesian "idea" has little to do with propositional content.

the elements in the novel. And crucially, it is attending to and explaining this unity that constitutes proper engagement with a novel on the part of the literary critic.[95]

And other critics developed versions of James's central insight—most importantly Virginia Woolf, who remarks in an essay on George Meredith that:

> [W]hen philosophy is not consumed in a novel, when we can underline this phrase with a pencil, and cut out that exhortation with a pair of scissors and paste the whole into a system, it is safe to say that there is something wrong with the philosophy or with the novel or with both. Above all, his teaching is too insistent […] characters in fiction resent [nothing] more. If, they seem to argue, we have been called into existence merely to express Mr. Meredith's views upon the universe, we would rather not exist at all. Thereupon they die; and a novel that is full of dead characters, even though it is also full of profound wisdom and exalted teaching, is not achieving its aim as a novel.[96]

Woolf expresses here, even more clearly than James, the importance of rendering philosophical ideas as organic parts of the work of fiction: when a philosophy can be "cut out," as the Victorians did with Eliot, there is "something wrong with the philosophy or the novel or both." And we see in the second half of the passage an anti-cognitivist theory of narrative emerging. When the novelist allows an expression of her ideas to dominate the

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[95] I am guided here by both positive and negative reactions to James's aesthetics in the next generation of writers. E. M. Forster, in *Aspects of the Novel*, claims "there is no philosophy in the novels," and that in James everything serves "the interests of the pattern. The longer James worked, the more convinced he grew that a novel should be a whole […] it should accrete round a single topic, situation, gesture, which should occupy the characters and provide a plot […] A pattern must emerge, and anything that emerged from the pattern must be pruned off as wanton distraction" (110). T.S. Eliot, in a much more admiring tone, states that "James's critical genius comes out most tellingly in his mastery over, his baffling escape from, Ideas."[95] The term 'idea' is no less complex in Eliot's use than it is James's own, but the point seems to be that James does not traffic in anything so straightforward as simple propositions. This famous passage is from Eliot's "In Memory," in the *Little Review* 5.4 (August 1918): 44-47. I am guided here from several sources, including most prominently Mary McCarthy's *Ideas and the Novel* (New York: Harcourt, 1980), which has an extended and critical treatment of the Jamesian theory of the novel.

[96] "George Meredith." *The Common Reader*, Second Series (New York: Mariner, 2003): 226.

structure of the work, the characters—who are thus merely means to express the author's "view upon the universe"—in some fashion "die," and the novel fails "as a novel." Woolf does not quite say that it is inappropriate to read a novel for its wisdom or exalted teaching, or that they are irrelevant to a work's virtues, but the impression is nevertheless clear that such things are incidental to the text's status as literary art.

This is not to say that the movement towards anti-cognitivism was quite complete. For one thing, James himself seemed to acknowledge that literature might have epistemological virtues. This is part of his critique of Anthony Trollope: noting Trollope's claim that he was only engaged in "make believe," James remarks that this is a "betrayal of a sacred office," insofar as "it implies that the novelist is less occupied in looking for the truth […] than the historian (56). Even if James thinks the ideas within a novel can only be properly understood in relation to each other and as part of an overall structure, there is no reason, it seems, to think that this structure—once understood—will be cognitively empty. The "sacred office" of the Jamesian novelist, in fact, is to ensure that the novel will *not* be empty in this way. And to draw in a crucially non-academic critic, the literary criticism of H.L. Mencken combined admiration for formalist aesthetics with the celebration of the capacity to convey ideas.[97] He commends Balzac and Zola as figures who "deal seriously and honestly with the larger problems of life," and complains of much American literature that "the flow of words is completely purged of ideas" (202; 219). There is thus in both figures the potential for a cognitivist formalism, which celebrates formal innovation alongside profundity of thought, and does not portray a tension between the two.

But the movement towards anti-cognitivism would eventually triumph in the Anglo-American academy. In *The Craft of Fiction*, his 1921 interpretation of James's prefaces, Percy

[97] *A Book of Prefaces* (New York: Knopf, 1917): 199. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

Lubbock developed a version of the Jamesian account that was much more hostile to a notion of the novel as a vehicle for propositional content. Lubbock famously distinguishes between "showing" and "telling": in his words, "the art of fiction does not begin until the novelist thinks of his story as a matter to be *shown*, to be so exhibited that it will tell itself."[98] Now, as Dorothy Hale has suggested, this is still not quite incompatible with a cognitivist theory—in her gloss, "when Lubbock insists that the novelist show rather than tell, he only means that the novelist should represent her judgments *indirectly* rather than expressly" (55). But it is nevertheless eager to prevent the separation of such judgments from the aesthetic experience itself, insofar as ideal novelistic form require that the author not overtly communicate anything to the reader: in Hale's gloss, "If anyone is to speak for himself in the Lubbockian novel, it must be a character, whose partiality is subordinated to the objective and coherent whole of the 'piece'" (56). We can see here something like the ontological version of the artistic thesis, as well as an idea closely akin to Woolf's: Lubbock is requiring that the work of art not embody the artist's ideas too obviously, and that no one communicate them too straightforwardly.

The anti-cognitivist way of thinking about narrative culminated in the New Criticism; this movement, as Gene Bell-Viada has noted, represented the next development from the "art for art's sake views" of the British aesthetes.[99] In his foundational text *The Well-Wrought Urn* (1947), Cleanth Brooks argued that it is in terms of "structure" that "one must describe poetry," where this is:

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[98] *The Craft of Fiction* (New York: Scribner's and sons, 1921): 62. Emphasis in original.

[99] Gene Bell-Viada, *Art for Art's Sake and Literary Life: How Politics and Markets Helped Shape the Ideology and Culture of Aestheticism, 1790-1990* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996). As his subtitle suggests, Bell-Viada offers a sociological account of the rise of the New Criticism, emphasizing features like the correspondence between the pedagogical applicability of the techniques of New Criticism and the need to teach the population of new college students created by the G. I. Bill. (184). Though I will not touch on such issues here, my genealogy is, I believe, compatible with his.

> [A] structure of meanings, evaluations, and interpretations; and the principle of unity which informs it seems to be one of balancing and harmonizing qualifications […] The unity is not a unity of the sort to be achieved by the reduction and simplification appropriate to an algebraic formula. It is a positive unity, not a negative; it represents not a residue, but an achieved harmony.[100]

This is akin to James's notion about the way a novelist's "idea" must permeate every element of a novel. Brooks is arguing that interpreting a poem means understanding its "harmony"—the way its various elements, which include but are not limited to its meter, rhyme, and other standard poetic devices, cohere in some fashion.

On this view, while a poem might involve some propositional ideas or theoretical content, it is crucially mistaken to think that an understanding of such is an understanding of the poem. Brooks thus acknowledges that "the dimension in which the poems moves is not one which excludes ideas," but goes on to say that "any proposition asserted in a poem is not to be taken in abstraction but is justified, in terms of the poem, not by virtue of its scientific or historical or philosophical truth, but […] in terms of a principle analogous to that of dramatic propriety. Thus, the proposition that 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty' is given its precise meaning and significance by its relation to the total context of the poem" (1360).[101] This is to say that while poems certainly do engage in ideas, one cannot treat them as simple expositions of a set of propositions.

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[100] "The Heresy of Paraphrase." Included in the *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch et al (New York: W. W. Norton and co., 2010): 1355. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

[101] He explains further that "the idea which we abstract—assuming that we can all agree on what that idea is—will always be *abstracted*: it will always be the projection of a plane along a line" (1360). Thus, even if we overcome the context problem and generate a justified paraphrase of the poem's ideas, this does not constitute a valid interpretation of the poem. One does not engage with the ideas of a poem *as* ideas, whether scientific or philosophical; rather, the proper response is to attend to the function of the propositions in the context of the poem as a whole.

The techniques of narrative interpretation that stem from this way of thinking about literature are perhaps most apparent in *Understanding Fiction*, a textbook composed by Brooks and Robert Penn Warren. The opening essay of the book, a "Letter to the Teacher," indicates that it "is their first article of faith that the structure of a piece of fiction, in so far as that piece of fiction is successful, must involve a vital and functional relationship between the idea and the other elements in that structure. (xvii). In other words, although thematic content matters, it is essentially important only insofar as it creates an aesthetic structure. Admittedly, Brooks and Warren allow that it is better when the ideas are profound ones: "a piece of fiction must involve an idea of some real significance for mature and thoughtful human beings" (xvii). But they ultimately stress that the idea does not matter as an idea: "The mere presence in a piece of fiction of an idea which is held to be important […] does not necessarily indicate anything about the importance of the piece of fiction. One might almost as well commend a piece of fiction for exemplifying good grammar" (xvii-xviii). This stresses, I think, the ultimately secondary and contingent nature of literary cognitive content in the New Critical approach to fiction—no matter how profound, ideas are ultimately only as important a part of literary art as grammar.

One finds the anti-cognitivism impulse equally in the 1942 textbook *Theory of Literature*, by René Wellek and Austin Warren. Writing of psychology in literature, they indicate that even if an author's portrayal is accurate, "we may well raise the question whether such 'truth' is an artistic value."[102] Making the formalism clear, they go on to say, "psychological truth is an artistic value only if it enhances coherence and complexity" (93). Perhaps most overtly, in a section aptly titled "Literature and Ideas," they ask rhetorically, "Must we not rather conclude that 'philosophical truth' as such has no artistic value just as

[102] René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (New York: Harcourt, 1942): 92. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

we argued that psychological or social truth has no artistic value as such?" and conclude, "Poetry of ideas is like other poetry, not to be judged by the value of the material but by its degree of integration and artistic intensity" (124). The idea that intellectual content might contribute to a text's artistic value, and moreover that one might appreciate the text primarily by engaging with that content, is on this view deeply mistaken; even if present, the only way such elements can matter is insofar as they contribute to the "complexity" of a poem.

As historians of English as a discipline have noted, the New Criticism spread quickly; this way of thinking about literature became the dominant methodology in academic literary criticism by the late 1950's.[103] It has had a tumultuous history since: though it would be largely supplanted in literature departments, first by the rise of structuralist and (almost immediately afterwards) post-structuralist thought, and subsequently by the hermeneutics of suspicion and ideology critique, it remains a central touchstone in most critical anthologies. Moreover, the anti-cognitivist impulse would prove durable, to the point that one literary critic could proclaim confidently, "Novels and poems—to repeat the trustworthy commonplace—aren't made out of ideas."[104] And it continues to appear, even in texts that are in some sense predicated on denying it: in *George Eliot's Intellectual Life*, Avrom Fleishman dismisses the interpreter who claims "here is an idea in a novel or poem, and the author must have believed it" as practicing a mere "extractive approach," and champions instead a "functional approach," which examines "how an idea works in the course of a novel." In

[103] This claim is probably too familiar to need citation, but see, for instance, the introduction to the *Norton Anthology of Literary Criticism*,, 3-4; John Guillory's *Cultural Capital* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995): 134-141; and Bell-Viada, 186-190.
[104] Duke Maskell, "Locke and Sterne; or, Can Philosophy Influence Literature?" *Essays in Criticism: A Quarterly Journal of Literary Criticism* 23 (1973): 22-40, 36. I am grateful to Roger Maioli for directing me to this essay.

this preference for aesthetic structure over intellectual content, it is difficult not to see a version of the kind of criticism Woolf alluded to and Brooks and Warren practiced.[105]

What is more, for all the ways in which structuralist and post-structuralist models of literary interpretation resisted the theoretical commitments of New Criticism, they nevertheless largely agreed that literary texts did not make assertions that interpretations might usefully summarize. This was an overt position in the first great rise of structuralist narratology, developed by figures like Tzvetan Todorov, Roland Barthes, and Gerard Genette.[106] As Todorov explains in his essay "Structural Analysis of Narrative":

> [S]tructural analysis coincides (in its basic tenets) with theory, with the poetics of literature. Its object is the literary discourse rather than works of literature, literature that is virtual rather than real. Such analysis seeks no longer to articulate a paraphrase, a rational resume of the concrete work, but to propose a theory of the structure and operation of the literary discourse, to present a spectrum of literary possibilities, in such a manner that the existing works of literature appear as particular instances that have been realized.[107]

This is to say that for the structuralists, the point of literary analysis is not to generate an interpretation of a particular work, but rather to understand the way general linguistic laws function in generating specific texts. As Todorov puts it, the goal is to understand the nature

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[105] Avrom Fleishman, *George Eliot's Intellectual Life* ((New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), x. I touch on this issue as well in my review of Fleishman's book. *Review 19*; URL: http://www.nbol19.org.

[106] I am guided in my understanding of the history of narratology by David Herman's many useful discussions of the field, particularly the entry on "Structuralism" in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2005) and his introductory essay to *Narratologies* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999).

[107] Todorov, Tzvetan and Weinstein, Arnold, "Structural Analysis of Narrative," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 3.1 (Autumn, 1969): 70-76, 70-71. In fact, Todorov faults the New Critics for producing only "paraphrase of the work, which is supposed to reveal the meaning better than the work itself" (70). In this sense, the structuralists take themselves to be even more critical of interpretations that generate paraphrases than the New Critics, who would by no means have described themselves as engaged in "paraphrase."

of "literary discourse" generally, and individual works of literature are relevant mainly as "particular instances" or realizations of that discourse.[108]

Similarly, the post-structuralist criticism of narrative by figures like Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man, and J. Hillis Miller, ultimately shared key New Critical assumptions. The connection between the deconstructive critics and the New Critics has been a topic of some interest in recent scholarship. Bell-Viada in his history of aestheticism argues that "deconstruction and its kin qualify as latter-day elaborations of the Western tradition of Art for Art's sake" and, more polemically, that such critics see the belief that literature might "help us see the truth" as just "pre-Derridean preserve of naïve readers" (196; 271). Less polemically, but ultimately making a similar point, Jane Gallop recently suggested that in the 1980's debates about literary theory, "while those against theory fought hard to defend the heritage of New Criticism, it turns out that many of those on the other side were practicing, often under the name of deconstruction, a form of close reading of literary texts not in fact so radically different from New Criticism."[109] She goes on: "Looking back now at that period, I would emphasize not the debate about theory but the close-reading practice appearing on both sides of the divide" (182).

One way in which the two practices of close reading coincided was their mutual insistence that literary texts did not convey theoretical content. As Derrida explains, to read a literary text as a straightforward expression of ideas would be an example of "transcendent

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[108] A paradigmatic example of this sort of reading is David Lodge's classic essay, "Analysis and Interpretation of the Realist Text," which offers a reading in structuralist terms of Hemingway's short story "Cat in the Rain." *Poetics Today* 1.4 (1980): 5-22. Lodge notes a critical disagreement about the story, and suggests that "the structuralist notion of language as a system of difference and of meaning as the product of structural oppositions can genuinely help to settle a point of interpretation" (16).

[109] Jane Gallop, "The Historicization of Literary Studies and the Fate of Close Reading." *Profession* (2007), pp. 181-186, 182. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

reading," which he seeks to "put in question."[110] To "transcend" in this regard means "going beyond interest for the signifier, the form, the language […] in the direction of the meaning or referent"; as an alternative, Derrida defends interpretive techniques that analyze "the functioning of language" and thus note the problematics of reference and assertion (45). On this view, "'good' literary criticism"'—indeed, "the only worthwhile kind"—tries not to offer a coherent summary or analysis of a literary text, but instead "never lets itself be 'completely objectified"' (52).[111]

The practical dismissal of literary assertions is particularly apparent in Derrida's analysis of Franz Kafka's parable "Before the Law." Derrida might have understood the parable as asserting a very deconstructive insight: the story describes a man who tries to gain admission to "the law," but is barred by a doorkeeper; he waits for many years, only to learn just before his death that no one ever gains access to the law. In this way, the story could offer an allegory for the fruitless pursuit of a clear referential foundation for language.[112] However, this would be to read the story transcendently. He thus instead suggests:

> The story *Before the Law* does not tell or describe anything but itself as text. It does only this or does also this. Not within an assured specular reflection of self-referential transparency […] but in the unreadability of the text, if one understands by this the impossibility of acceding to its proper significance and its possibly

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[110] "'This Strange Institution Called Literature': An Interview with Jacques Derrida." In *Acts of Literature,* ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992): 33-75, 43. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.
[111] This has implications for the way literary criticism is written, for the critic does this by offering "an inventive experience of language, *in* language, an inscription of the act of reading in the field of the text that is read" (52). This is a complex notion, but I take Derrida to be suggesting that the literary critic who diagnoses the impossibility of straightforward reference or transcendence in a given literary text, while writing an essay that itself relies on such language, fails to realize that the same linguistic structures that create the instability in the literary text also affect the language of analysis. Thus, literary critics cognizant of post-structuralist insights about language must write in a way that, through "inventiveness" and a refusal to offer an "objectified" meaning, enacts the linguistic features the essay purportedly analyzes. In this sense, the summary I have given here is contrary to Derrida's spirit, for I have read him "transcendently" rather than engaging in my own "inventive experience of language."
[112] "Before the Law" in *Acts of Literature,* ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992): 181-220, 196-97. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

> inconsistent content, which it jealously keeps back. The text guards itself, maintains itself—like the law, speaking only of itself, that is to say, of its non-identity with itself. (210-211)

This is to say that the Kafka parable is interesting for Derrida not because its allegorical content is philosophically persuasive, nor even because it is about itself in a way that demonstrates its awareness of its textual nature, but rather because its elements function together in such a way as to make the text "unreadable," by which I take Derrida to mean impossible to paraphrase—as he puts it later, "ultimately ungraspable, incomprehensible" (211). It thus guards itself, preventing access to its "content."

And finally, the dismissal of the text's "overt" or "superficial" ideas is an essential part of the process of "symptomatic reading" and the broader "hermeneutics of suspicion." The classic statement of this sort of reading is a passage from Fredric Jameson's 1981 text *The Political Unconscious*, which asserts that "interpretation proper" or "strong rewriting" depends upon "some mechanism of mystification or repression in terms of which it would make sense […] to rewrite the surface categories of a text in the stronger language of a more fundamental interpretive code."[113] Moreover, responding to an interlocutor who claims "the text means just what it says," he writes:

> Unfortunately, no society has ever been quite so mystified in quite so many ways as our own, saturated as it is with messages and information, the very vehicles of mystification […] If everything were transparent, then no ideology would be possible, and no domination either: evidently that is not our case. (46)

The point here is that, as with the previous three models, attention to the text's straightforward assertions misunderstands the right way to approach cultural products: one

[113] *The Political Unconscious* (New York: Routledge, 2002): 45-46.

ought instead to look for what the text does not or, as Jameson points out elsewhere, *cannot* say.[114] This lets the critic penetrate the cover of ideological mystification and reveal the way in which the text is a symptom of some "more fundamental" process.

Although Jameson prefers an emphasis on political processes, his reference to the possibility of multiple versions of fundamental codes alludes to the notion that critics using a number of different theoretical frames could deploy this tactic of reading.[115] And much of the literary criticism since 1981 has indeed taken Jameson's provocative argument as an interpretive guide, to the extent that Eve Sedgwick—who herself developed a powerful symptomatic reading in *The Epistemology of the Closet*—remarked in 2003 that "in the context of recent U.S. literary theory," "to apply a hermeneutics of suspicion is […] widely understood as a mandatory injunction rather than a possibility among other possibilities."[116] Rita Felski summarizes this attitude by remarking that current approaches "share the conviction that the most rigorous reading is one that is performed against the grain, that the primary rationale for reading a text is to critique it by underscoring what it does not know and cannot understand."[117] Felski makes clear that Jameson's suggestion has been thoroughly followed, as a variety of theoretical frameworks have been deployed as fundamental "codes" used to identify some feature of the world the literary text "does not know and cannot understand."

What is important here is the fact that Derrida, Jameson, and their compatriots and followers are dismissing literary assertions in the same way the New Critics and the

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[114] For an effective discussion of Jameson on this point, see Jeremy Tambling's *Allegory* (London: Routledge, 2009): 156.
[115] Jameson overtly suggests this, noting that psychoanalysis has long served as similar fundamental code for a number of critics, and is in some sense "the most influential and elaborate interpretive system of recent times" (46).
[116] "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're so Paranoid, You Probably Think this Essay is about You," 125. In *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Duke University Press: Durham, 2003).
[117] "Suspicious Minds." *Poetics Today* 32.2 (Summer 2011): 215-234, 217.

Structuralists did. Admittedly, in Derrida's analysis, the ideas in Kafka's parable matter insofar as they produce "unreadability," whereas in Jameson's analysis, the ideas matter insofar as they produce an ideological cover; both differ from the New Critical emphasis on their subsumption to form and the Structuralist reference to them as evidence of linguistic laws. But there is nevertheless an implicit agreement among all these ways of approaching a text that the ideas are not worthy of analysis in themselves, and that the literary critic must in some sense look past them.[118]

This, ultimately, is the interpretive impulse I want to resist. I want to defend (to borrow Felski's terms) reading "with," as opposing to reading "against," the "grain" of the text.[119] Such approaches to reading need not entail a dismissal of formal considerations: as suggested, I hope to defend a conception of content formalism. And there is no need to limit the attention to such ideas to the realm of ethics: though I have emphasized the way narratives offer claims in moral philosophy, one could argue that they offer assertions recognizable in many fields. Now, this approach is part of the broader movement against the hermeneutics of suspicion that a number of critics have recently initiated. In the context of the nineteenth-century novel, particularly relevant here is Sharon Marcus's account of "just reading":

> Just reading attends to what Jameson, in his pursuit of hidden master codes, dismisses as "the inert givens and materials of a particular text […] I invoke the word

[118] I do not mean to deny that there have been dissident voices recommending something similar to the approach I defend here. Gerald Graff has defended the notion that literary texts can make "truth claims"; see especially the "Literature as Propositions" section in *Literature Against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979). Frederick Crews's satires of a number of theoretical approaches, most recently in *Postmodern Pooh* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001), perhaps also ultimately support something like content formalism. And there may be other scholars, of whom I am not aware, defending similar views. However, such ideas are decidedly the minority view.

[119] Tim Bewes deserves credit for developing this phrase, though I am not sure I am using it quite the way he does, which is carefully attuned to the debates in Marxist aesthetics from which the metaphor arises. "Reading with the Grain: A New World in Literary Criticism." *Differences* 21.3 (Fall 2010): 1-33.

> "just" in its many senses. Just reading strives to be adequate to a text conceived as complex and ample rather than as diminished by, or reduced to, what it had to repress. Just reading accounts for what it is in the text without construing presence as absence or affirmation as negation.[120]

There is a good deal here to admire.[121] The approach I am recommending sees literary narratives as complex expressions of sophisticated ideas, and tries to understand their elements as components of such expressions. This, I think, is a version of Marcus's conception of texts as "complex and ample," and moreover fits with her decision to account for what is "in the text" as opposed to looking for evidence of absence.[122]

Finally and perhaps most important, content formalism is largely a re-described way of doing what a number of critics already do. Either because they do not fall into any of the theoretical schools described here, or because they do so in the course of performing a deconstructive or New Historicist reading, many critics nevertheless end up interpreting a literary work's intellectual content. The discussion of *The Mill on the Floss* and my argument in the Preface hopefully implied this to a certain extent, but let me clarify it further by briefly anticipating the argument of the next chapter. A core part of my argument is that Eliot

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[120] *Between Women* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007): 75.

[121] A special issues of *Representations*, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," edited by Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, included a number of critics reacting to the hermeneutics of suspicion and the practice of symptomatic reading in favor of what Best and Marcus there call "surface reading," of which Marcus' "just reading" is a type. The approach I am developing is broadly congruent with surface reading as well, which the authors describe as in part taking texts "at face value," and emphasizing the "surface as literal meaning" of a work (12). See *Representations* 108.1 (Fall 2009): 1-21 for a description of the issue's entries and broad themes.

[122] Marcus continues: "Finally, just reading recognizes that interpretation is inevitable: even when attending to the givens of a text, we are always only—or just—constructing a reading. To pursue just reading is thus not to make an inevitably disingenuous claim to transparently reproduce a text's unitary meaning" (75). Now, this final claim might seem to split "just reading" off from the approach I am suggesting, but it is possible to see it as developing a key point in sympathy with my view: philosophical formalism need not be committed to the claim that its readings of literary texts must "transparently reproduce" a "unitary meaning." Literary texts can conceivably offer many things to readers, and we need not suggest that offering paraphrasable philosophical content is the only or even the most important thing they do. Rather, one need only defend the weaker claim that one of the things they can do is make assertions, and that an engagement with such assertions is worthwhile.

thinks the formation of a "conception of the good" is a central step in the development of moral agency; this is a conception of oneself and one's world such that enables, among other things, meaningful projects. The chapter develops this interpretation by drawing on some older criticism on Eliot: my interpretation in this regard is essentially similar to Alan Mintz's notion that Eliot is interested in the formation of "vocations"; to Ken Newton's claim that Eliot depicts the way "service to a vision" can "direct" one's life; and to J. Hillis Miller's notion that *Middlemarch* portrays individuals realizing that they create their own "patterns of value."[123] Though my terminology differs slightly from theirs, I suspect that this reflects not so much any disagreement about how to interpret the particular textual passages as it does a divergent sense of which philosophical issues matter to Eliot. Here, largely, my interpretation proceeds not in opposition to a critical tradition, but by sympathetically integrating it.

Joshua Landy has recently spoken of the need to "rescue" literary criticism from this sort of tradition, which he depicts as constituted by a group of "meaning-mongers" who constantly read for "the message" of literary texts.[124] The phrase implies both dismissiveness and ubiquity, and Landy goes on to suggest both that reading for the message is essentially everywhere—he speaks of high schools and the public domain—and defended seriously nowhere in the present academy.[125] While his own interpretive approach diametrically opposes my recommendation of a criticism that openly seeks to develop paraphrases of the

[123] Alan Mintz, George Eliot and The Novel of Vocation (Cambridge: Havard University Press, 1978): 66-67; Newton, *George Eliot: Romantic Humanist* (Totowa: Barnes and Noble, 1981): 74; J. Hillis Miller, *The Form of Victorian Fiction: Thackeray, Dickens, Trollope, George Eliot, Meredith, and Hardy* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968): 118.
[124] Joshua Landy, *How to Do Things with Fictions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012): 8.
[125] As he puts it, a reading strategy based on the comprehension of "propositional content" is the one "currently being taught in high schools" and "evaluated in the public domain" (8). He does not put his claim about the academy in terms I have used here: however, he charts "thirteen ways of looking at a fiction," and then indicates that they include "over a dozen non-message-based theories" (6). Thus, the implication, not quite stated, is that an approach based on "reading for the message" lacks a serious theoretical account. I have touched on these essays in my review of his book, "Why Books Can Be Good For You." *Journal of Literary Theory*, 3/27/2013. URL: http://www.jltonline.de/index.php/reviews/article/view/548/1384

profound intellectual content in literary works, nevertheless I agree with Landy to some extent on the nature of the problem. We "meaning-mongers" need to do a better job of explaining and justifying what we do. I hope to have accomplished at least the start of such a general theory here: content formalism, as an interpretive approach, is in the last analysis just a self-conscious version of a kind of criticism a number of writers already practice in some form. If this self-consciousness is worth anything, its value hopefully appears in the confrontation with the hard questions about the nature of aesthetic structure that honesty about literary cognitivism brings to the fore.

George Eliot's Moral Philosophy

Critics have for some time recognized the importance of moral philosophy to George Eliot's fiction, and in particular its sophisticated reflections on the ethical importance of sympathy.[126] Indeed, this recognition was in some sense commensurate with the very recognition of Eliot as an author worthy of serious interpretive attention.[127] Eliot's conception of sympathy has been, moreover, the topic of a good deal of critical attention in recent years, and in a broad way there is an agreement on what sympathy ideally involves—the imaginative identification with another person. When one asks a few questions about how specifically Eliot supposes sympathy to function, however, what emerges is that despite the long history of criticism on the ethics of sympathy, there remains very little substantive agreement about the particulars. This is to say that when one inquires how Eliot thinks sympathy is supposed to work within a conception of moral agency—an inquiry involving details like which features of a person or a state of affairs should elicit sympathy, what exactly the content (whether affective, cognitive or otherwise) of an act of sympathy is, and

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[126] This tradition is apparent in U.C. Knoepflmacher's 1964 interpretation, which argued that "doing justice to her work" requires seeing Eliot as both an artist and a philosopher." U.C. Knoepflmacher, "George Eliot, Feuerbach, and the Question of Criticism." *Victorian Studies* 7 (1964): 306-309, 306. Eliot's biographers have insisted on this as well; to mention three, Gordon Haight, Rosemary Ashton, and Avrom Fleishman have each drawn heavily on Eliot's reading in philosophy for an understanding of her life and fiction. See Gordon S. Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968); Rosemary Ashton, *The German Idea: Four English Writers and the Reception of German Thought, 1800-1860* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1994 (1980); *George Eliot: A Life* (New York: Penguin, 1986), and Avrom Fleishman, *George Eliot's Intellectual Life.* More recently, Moira Gatens has argued that Eliot's fiction represents a conscious attempt to practice a different kind of philosophy. "The Art and Philosophy of George Eliot." *Philosophy and Literature* 33.1 (April 2009): 73-90. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

[127] I have in mind here F.R. Leavis's discussion in *The Great Tradition* (New York: Penguin, 1948). See, for instance, his suggestion that Henry James mistakenly sees an "antithesis" between aesthetic form and didactic fable, and suggests that Eliot, like any "great novelist," demonstrates "imaginative sympathy, moral discrimination, and judgment of relative human value" (41).

how precisely the fact of sympathizing causes or affects an agent's subsequent actions—it becomes clear that there is nothing like a critical consensus on Eliot's view. Indeed, when examined with respect to the issue of sympathetic moral agency, even critics who otherwise seem to agree on Eliot's view turn out to understand sympathy in different ways.

To see this, let me work through some of the more influential recent interpretations. Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth has suggested that sympathy for Eliot involves the fundamental questioning of one's self-conception, on the basis of encounters with agents whom one recognizes as defining themselves differently.[128] On her view, Eliot's Romola embodies this capacity, since Romola has "the power to question herself, the ability to acknowledge mistakes, and the capacity to recognize validity in claims inconsistent with her own" (29). Agents like Tito Melema, who are self-assured and trust no one, miss the fact that "clarity of self-definition" depends upon contact with others (41). One ought instead to develop like Romola: she encounters a series of men—her father, Tito, and Savonarola—submitting to each and redefining her goals in accord with their projects. As a result of this development, Romola "learns how to trust herself," discovering that "personal freedom can be found only in relation to others" (30-31). This is to say, then, that it is the recognition of differing self-conceptions that ought to elicit sympathy, that sympathy involves the reflective acceptance of a new set of goals, and that resulting action ensues from the moral agent's revised understanding of herself.

Rachel Ablow is similarly interested in sympathy as "a psychic structure" that functions as a "mode of relating to others and of defining a self," but understands this

[128] Elizabeth Ermarth, "George Eliot's Conception of Sympathy." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 40.1 (June 1985), 23-42: 28; George Eliot, *Romola* (New York: Penguin, 1996), Ed. Dorothea Barrett: 244. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

process somewhat differently than Ermarth.[129] For Ablow, Eliot is especially concerned with the way sympathy can produce a kind of erasure of the self, one that is potentially morally problematic. On her interpretation, Maggie's succumbing to Stephen Guest in the truncated elopement at the climax of *The Mill on the Floss* exemplifies this aspect of sympathetic deliberation. Indeed the word "deliberation" is not quite right; as Ablow sees it, Maggie's sympathy with Stephen is "involuntary, unconscious, and apparently irresistible. Further, it makes her utterly subject to her desire and to his will" (76). In other words, sympathy does not so much cause Maggie to decide to elope with Stephen as it does overwhelm her capacity to decide entirely. More generally, Ablow thus suggests that is an instinctive affinity with others that elicits sympathy, that the content of such states is an erasure of one's agency—or a merger between one's agency and another's—and that the moral agent subsequently acts only through the psychic state she shares with a partner.

Audrey Jaffe shares with Ablow an interest in sympathy as erasure—indeed her work precedes Ablow's—but has an alternate account of the erasing process.[130] In her argument, it is crucial that the act of sympathy involves imaginative representation; this representation, she suggests, is constituted through the sympathizing agent's "social and cultural identity," and thus what is sympathized *with* is less the actual other person than a projection of that other person on the basis of the sympathizer's concepts (4). Thus, as she puts it in her discussion of Eliot, "sympathy with the other turns out to be sympathy with the self" (133). *Daniel Deronda* captures this dynamic precisely, as what initially appears to be Daniel's sympathy with a genuine other—the Jewish nationalists led by Mordecai—turns out to be just an expression of his own identity, as Daniel himself turns out to be Jewish (156). For

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[129] Rachel Ablow's *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 2. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.
[130]Audrey Jaffe, *Scenes of Sympathy*: *Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000). Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

Jaffe, the states that elicit sympathy are "spectacles" or "scenes," and the content of the act of sympathizing is an imaginative construction of that spectacle, in which the sympathizer identifies with the subject—a socio-cultural "Other"—of the scene.[131] Nevertheless, such identifications are limited by the identity of the sympathizer, and thus action stems less from genuine understanding of the other person and instead from the agent's original beliefs.

D.A. Miller, likewise skeptical of the ability of sympathy to transcend the differences between people, understands the capacity in linguistic terms.[132] In his account of *Middlemarch*, he suggests that sympathy involves "a transcendent expression of fellowship whose transparent signs no longer require interpretation," and more specifically that the attempt to "transcend egoism in direct fellow-feeling" involves an effort "to overcome textuality in an experience whose meaning is self-evident" (170; 180). Dorothea's climactic encounter with Rosamond Vincy at the end of *Middlemarch* exemplifies this sort of sympathy. It is crucial for Miller that the characters cannot quite speak at the crucial moment: Rosamond responds to Dorothea's speechlessness, and their subsequent actual conversation seems "no more than the overspill of a sublime and almost erotic communion" (182). In a way similar to Jaffe, Miller explains this account of sympathy in order to note the fact that it does not occur: he goes on to suggest that Eliot shows this apparent "instance of recognition and truth" is actually the product of "misunderstanding and error" (183). Nevertheless Miller's interpretation leaves an account of what sympathy would be if it ever could take place: it seems to be elicited by a certain sort of frustration with the difficulty of interpretation; its

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[131] This is how I understand Jaffe's introduction, where she remarks that in a scene of sympathy, "a confrontation between a spectator "at ease" and a sufferer raises issues about their mutual constitution; in each, the sufferer is effectively replaced by the spectator's image of him or herself" (2). There is a slight tension in understanding which features of the world elicit sympathy; since the scene is constructed by the spectator, presumably anything might be represented as a scene of sympathy. But if I understand Jaffe correctly, there is a scene that precedes the spectator's representation of it; upon finding themselves in moments that call for sympathy, Jaffe's spectators then reconstruct sufferers through their own representational lenses.

[132] D.A. Miller's chapter on Eliot in *Narrative and its Discontents* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981). Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

content is a direct engagement with another person's mind, in a way not structured by language; finally, its effect is a sort of transcendent mutuality.

Finally, Rae Greiner has recently suggested that sympathy involves the positing of another person within a narrative: as she puts it, "sympathizing with the other isn't a matter of seeing and knowing, much less being in contact with other bodies, but "situating" the other in an imaginative narrative temporality."[133] Rather than a "spontaneous eruption of emotion," then, the "successful sympathizer," by encountering others imaginatively, sees his own behavior "in the light in which the impartial spectator would view it" (297). For Greiner—perhaps unsurprisingly—few of Eliot's characters manifest this capacity; it is instead better understood as an ability of her narrator (300). But the failures Greiner notes indicate how she thinks sympathy works as a component of moral agency. Neither Rosamond Vincy nor *The Lifted Veil*'s Latimer "engages reflexive thought"; Greiner explains that Rosamond does this by refusing to imagine others, while Latimer—who is telepathic—cannot do it because "he already knows" what everyone is thinking. Thus Greiner suggests that sympathy should result from a recognition of intersubjective encounters, and in particular the "thinking" of other people, and that its content is a sort of exchange—neither a full awareness of the other person's thoughts, nor a complete dismissal of them. The connection to action is not quite clear: Greiner suggests that Eliot offers a "sympathy of 'doing,' not just thinking or feeling," and thus that action takes place "in the absence of knowledge," but it is not apparent what relation particular moral actions bear to the act of sympathizing (293).

[133] Rae Greiner, "Sympathy Time: Adam Smith, George Eliot, and The Realist Novel." *Narrative* 17.3 (October 2009): 291-311, 296. She has reiterated these views in her recent book, *Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

Many of these accounts are not in obvious tension; indeed, in some cases there is implicit agreement. Despite these points of connection, however, each of these interpretations reveals a significantly different understanding of how Eliot thinks sympathy functions as a component of moral agency. Although they both see sympathy as bearing on the constitution of subjectivity, Ermarth and Ablow disagree on how agents deliberate sympathetically: Ermarth's view, where agents reflectively inhabit and in some cases submit to the goals of other agents, differs significant from Ablow's picture of a sort of dissolution of agency. Even though both Jaffe and Miller agree that sympathy ultimately involves a sort of misunderstanding, a failure to actually recognize the other as other, their views do not concur on how this process develops within the mind of the agent: for instance, sympathy is elicited on Jaffe's view by an obvious scene of a socio-cultural Other in pain, while for Miller it is the product of a continual frustration with the necessity of interpretation.

Further examination of the scholarship, moreover, only reveals further disagreement. While a number of critics concur with Jaffe's suggestion that it is the scene of suffering that elicits sympathy, there is an equally distinct tradition that sees sympathy in Eliot as a much more everyday capacity. Suzy Anger has recently developed this view, arguing that for Eliot ordinary interpretation of the world requires sympathetic hermeneutics.[134] As she puts it, the "correct interpretation of any utterance is grounded in the intentions of the speaker," and thus ordinary comprehension requires that one "enter imaginatively into the perspectives of others" (*Victorian Interpretation* 99). Other critics, less inclined than Anger to see Eliot as depicting successful acts of sympathy, nevertheless agree that it is primarily a capacity for

[134] *Victorian Interpretations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006). Further citations marked "*Victorian Interpretation*" and included parenthetically in the text.

linguistic interpretation.[135] Yet a third tradition, exemplified recently by Caroline Levine, sees sympathy as the product of a certain kind of surprise: sympathy is elicited by moments when moral agents are jarred out of their complacent self-satisfaction.[136]

There is an even wider variation on the content of sympathy. Catherine Gallagher has suggested that the standard view of Eliot's account of the ethics of sympathy is the recognition of the inadequacy of general categories: Dorothea Casaubon develops the capacity for sympathy when she becomes capable of seeing "others by imagining their particularity instead of pressing them into categories."[137] T. H. Irwin offers a more nuanced view in distinguishing between three kinds of sympathy—cognitive sympathy, where one agent recognizes how another feels; affective sympathy, where one agent actually shares the feeling of another agent; and practical sympathy, where one agent recognizes "what is bad" about another's situation and acts with regard to that other's interests.[138] In his account, Eliot depicts all three as constitutively interrelated, problematically suggesting—in Irwin's mind—that greater understanding of the feelings of others necessarily leads to caring about their interests. Leona Toker also distinguishes three kinds of sympathy in Eliot—ideological sympathy, which involves the toleration of other cultures; resonating sympathy, which involves the "synergistic union" with another's emotions; and redistributive sympathy, where affect is "rationed" and transferred from one agent to another.[139] *Daniel Deronda* puts these

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[135] For a recent example, see Thomas Albrecht, "Sympathy and Telepathy: The Problem of Ethics in George Eliot's *The Lifted Veil*." *ELH* 73.2 (Summer 2006): 437-463. Albrecht argues that the text undermines the peculiar telepathy of Latimer, the *Lifted Veil's* main character, by showing how his understanding of other other characters is mediated through his own idiosyncratic metaphors, and thus does not represent a genuine sympathy (445). As he indicates at several moments (see footnotes 15, 16, 17, 30, and the Notes header), he is thus sharing in a tradition developed by J. Hillis Miller, one in close proximity with the reading by D.A. Miller.
[136] Caroline Levine, "Surprising Realism." In *A Companion to George Eliot*, ed. Amanda Anderson and Harry Shaw (New York: Blackwell, 2013): 62-75.
[137] Catherine Gallagher, "George Eliot, Immanent Victorian." *Representations* 90 (Spring 2005): 61-74, 70. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.
[138] T.H. Irwin, "Sympathy and the Basis of Morality." In *A Companion to George Eliot*, 279-293.
[139] Leona Toker, "Vocation and Sympathy in *Daniel Deronda*: The Self and the Larger Whole." *Victorian Literature and Culture* 32.2 (September 2004): 565-574. Toker reiterated her views in *Towards the Ethics of Form in*

three accounts of sympathy into play, emphasizing in particular redistributive sympathy, as agents like Daniel accept the affect of others and erase part of themselves (569). Cara Weber, however, has suggested that it is a mistake to see Eliot's sympathy as founded on identification: Eliot sees the self as a dynamic process, not as a stable entity, and thus sympathy with another involves an affective and intellectual exchange over time, not a single act of transformative fellow feeling.[140]

Accordingly, critics offer divergent accounts of the effects of sympathy. Ellen Argyros articulates what is perhaps the most common view in suggesting that sympathetic identification produces "acts on behalf of the other."[141] Hina Nazar, however, offers an interpretation where the primary effect is a cognitive/emotional transformation in the object of sympathy: sympathetic agents like Dorothea hold up a "double mirror" to agents like Lydgate, one which shows them not only as they are but as they could be, with "the highest human potential."[142] This lets such agents recover their "wholeness," grasping themselves in new relationships with others (310). Ann Cvetkovich understands the effects of sympathy in a different register: the sympathy with marginalized groups, like the women embodied by Gwendolen Harleth, is primarily political, and points towards new forms of social organization which do not involve the ideological suppression of such groups.[143]

I do not mean this discussion to attribute failures to these critics, or even to dismiss one strain as mistaken or designate another as preferable. Rather, it seems to me that this

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Fiction: Narratives of Cultural Remission (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010), but her reading of Eliot's sympathy remains unaltered from the earlier essay.

[140] Cara Weber, " 'The Continuity of Married Companionship': Marriage, Sympathy, and the Self in *Middlemarch*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 66.4 (March 2012): 494-530.

[141] Ellen Argyros, *Without Any Check of Proud Reserve: Sympathy and its limits in George Eliot's Novels* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 2.

[142] Nazar, Hina. "Philosophy in the Bedroom: *Middlemarch* and the Scandal of Sympathy," *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 15.2 (2002), 293-314: 309-310. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

[143] Ann Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992) 132. It should perhaps be emphasized that Cvetkovich that Eliot's attempt to re-imagine a "politics of affect" is quite successful; I shall return to a fuller discussion of Cvetkovich in Interlude I.

divergent explanations of the nature of sympathy stem logically from the complexity of its representation in Eliot's works. This complexity goes beyond the ordinary difficulty of interpreting literature; it is the product, I want to suggest, of specific features of Eliot's writing. Six aspects of Eliot's discussion of sympathy seem particularly significant in creating the interpretive divergence.

First and perhaps foremost, it is rarely obvious whether a scene from Eliot's fiction is meant to exemplify the functioning of sympathy. In engaging Ablow's work, for instance, it is important to see that her argument centers on the idea that the moment when Maggie and Stephen are deciding whether to elope down the river is a moment of sympathetic engagement. Much hinges on whether this scene does so or not. The word itself is not used, but then, a limitation of scenes embodying sympathy to only those that actually use the word—or a cognate like fellow-feeling—seems to leave out a number of moments that clearly do exemplify sympathy. However, no other limiting principle seems to offer itself, and thus any scene of intersubjectivity—indeed, any scene with more than one character—can potentially offer implications for Eliot's view of sympathy.

Relatedly, even when speaking about the dozen or so scenes that almost all critics recognize as moments of sympathy, it is difficult to see how to reconcile the implications of those scenes when they are considered together. Critics widely agree that Romola's sympathizing with Savonarola and Dorothea's sympathizing with Lydgate both clearly embody Eliot's view, yet Ermarth's suggestion that sympathy is about the encounter with other self-definitions and Nazar's suggestion that sympathy involves presenting an alternative self to other agents seem incompatible—for one thing, on Ermarth's account the primary effects of sympathy are internal to the sympathizing agent, while for Nazar they primarily transform the sympathized-with agent. This is not the fault of Nazar or Ermarth.

Rather, it has to do with Eliot's very different portrayals of the psychology of sympathy in these two scenes.

Of course, it is crucial that Nazar is interpreting *Middlemarch* while Ermarth is interpreting Romola. And this leads to the second major issue in understanding Eliot's view: how to see the various novels in relation to each other. For instance, critical interest in *Daniel Deronda* has surged over the last twenty years, and an even more recent movement has emphasized *The Lifted Veil*. Both novels appear to question the importance placed on sympathy in *Middlemarch* and Eliot's other fiction: *Daniel Deronda* by suggesting that sympathy can be paralyzing and debilitating, and *The Lifted Veil* by suggesting the comprehension of another's thoughts may not lead one to act on their behalf. And so it is not surprising that accounts like Jaffe's differ from accounts like Ermarth's. Stemming as they do from different novels, the question such interpretations implicitly pose is how to interpret the various components of Eliot's oeuvre in conjunction with each other.

A third issue—one involving the way Eliot and her narrators tend to talk about sympathy—makes the conjunction between its various depictions more difficult to see. Let us consider two of the most famous passages regarding sympathy in Eliot's works, quoted in virtually every substantive discussion. The first is from *Daniel Deronda*:

> His early-wakened sensibility and reflectiveness had developed into a many-sided sympathy, which threatened to hinder any persistent course of action: as soon as he took up any antagonism, though only in thought, he seemed to himself like the Sabine warriors in the memorable story—with nothing to meet his spear but flesh of his flesh, and objects that he loved.[144]

The second is from an essay, "The Natural History of German Life."

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[144] George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*. Ed. Graham Handley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984): 336. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

> The greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies. Appeals founded on generalizations and statistics require a sympathy ready-made, a moral sentiment already in activity; but a picture of human life such as a great artist can give, surprises even the trivial and the selfish into that attention to what is apart from themselves, which may be called the raw material of moral sentiment.[145]

Here I do not want to try to interpret what these passages are saying, though I will return to them later. Instead, what I want to emphasize is the *way* they talk about sympathy: Eliot is less interested in saying what sympathy is than she is in discussing where it comes from, what it does, and how it is related to other attitudes. In the first passage, her emphasis is not on defining the concept of a "many-sided sympathy," but in suggesting that it exerts a certain kind of threat, one she renders with a metaphorical image. In the second passage, Eliot is again not defining sympathy; she is rather suggesting that this it is the core of moral feeling, that it can come from a certain kind of art, and that the moral appeal of art differs from "appeals founded on generalizations." It is possible to infer a definition—Eliot seems to be suggesting that sympathy is identical to "that attention to what is apart from" oneself—but this remains an inference rather than a clear statement. The point here is that Eliot often indicates her conception of sympathy through implication and inference, rather than clear description: although her narrators are famously discursive and theoretically sophisticated, they are more interested in the causes and effects of sympathy than its precise nature.[146]

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[145] *Essays of George Eliot*, ed. Thomas Pinney (London: Routledge, 1963): 266-299, 270. Further citation included parenthetically in the text.

[146] Eliot's narrators have drawn a great deal of critical attention, but for a classic essay on their philosophically aphoristic style, see Isobel Armstrong, "*Middlemarch*: A Note on George Eliot's 'Wisdom.'," *Critical Essays on George Eliot*, ed. Barbara Hardy (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1970): 116-132.

A fourth issue is related. Critics agree generally on which characters Eliot means to exemplify sympathetic agency—Daniel Deronda, Dorothea Casaubon, Romola, and Dinah Morris being perhaps the four most commonly cited. But what is essential to recognize about these characters, and about the host of others who manifest sympathy at some point, is that Eliot is not interested in portraying them statically: each represents a moral agent in development. Indeed, agents who successfully sympathize in an ideal way are extremely rare in Eliot's fiction. Dorothea crucially begins *Middlemarch* in a state of egoism and develops into a sympathetic heroine, while Daniel begins *Daniel Deronda* with a "many-sided sympathy" only to grow out of it. Thus large portions of their narratives cannot be taken as demonstrating sympathy the way Eliot thinks it ought to operate; instead, the critic must infer Eliot's theory of ideal moral agency from her portrayal of certain kinds of failure. And this is true about almost all of Eliot's characters: her egoists—Fred Vincy, Gwendolen Harleth, Esther Lyon—and men of vocation, like Adam Bede, Tom Tulliver, and Tertius Lydgate, are constantly in significant psychological development, and thus proper moral agency is rare, occurring if at all only at the end of a character's progression.

Part of this development includes the maturation and combination of various feelings and attitudes, moreover, and the relation between these attitudes and sympathy is not clear. Perhaps the most relevant would be the sort of telepathic awareness of the minds of others at the center of *The Lifted Veil*, and the feelings of pity and compassion: it is not apparent whether these should be thought as kinds of sympathy—as T.H. Irwin suggests—or as attitudes significantly different from sympathy proper, as Ellen Argyros and Thomas Albrecht, among others, suggest. More specifically, characters like Dinah Morris and Dorothea Casaubon clearly demonstrate pity alongside more famous acts of sympathy, and it

is debatable how these moments of their development should be understood in relation to each other.

Fifth, a significant reason Eliot's account of sympathy has drawn so much interest while creating so much difficulty is the fact that she thinks it has ramifications in aesthetic and political registers alongside its ethical dimension. It is not surprising that accounts like Greiner's and Levine's, which emphasize the aesthetics of sympathy as elucidated by realist fiction, differ from accounts like Cvetkovich's or Suzanne Graver's, which see sympathy as a political and social force.[147] A interesting oddity exacerbates this tension: Eliot writes extensively in her criticism about how great art can make a person more sympathetic, yet her novels never depict this sort of transformation. Thus the connections among aesthetic, political, and ethical sympathy—and more precisely, among Eliot's remarks about sympathy in these three registers—are not immediately apparent.

Finally, Eliot's various references to sympathy do not wear their intellectual pedigree on their face. Critics have done extensive work on Eliot's intellectual background, tracing her thinking about sympathy to the thought of Adam Smith, Ludwig Feuerbach, and Baruch Spinoza in particular, but these various influences are not obviously reconcilable, nor do Eliot's invocations of sympathy indicate which philosopher she has in mind. Thus when we ask which is preferable—the emphasis on Feuerbach in Ermarth and Nazar, the emphasis on Smith in Greiner and Jaffe, or the emphasis on Spinoza in K.M. Newton and Isobel Armstrong—the only honest answer can only be that each might be correct, and that none of them obviously is.[148]

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[147] Suzanne Graver, *George Eliot and Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
[148] Isobel Armstrong, "George Eliot, Spinoza, and the Emotions." *A Companion to George Eliot*, 294-308; Newton, *George Eliot: Romantic Humanist* (Totowa: Barnes and Noble, 1981). I shall return to both of these arguments later in the chapter.

On the basis of these facts, it would be easy to conclude that there is not a coherent account of sympathy in Eliot's works. Certainly other critics have done so; as Jonathan Loesberg notes, there is a long tradition of thinking that Eliot's "ethics, aesthetics, and realism are in some unresolvable contradiction."[149] In this chapter, however, I will argue that there is a surprising degree of coherence in Eliot's ethical thought: the interpretive difficulties, once acknowledged, can be at least partially overcome, and reappear as dimensions and components of Eliot's ethical thought.

Indeed, while the divergence one finds in accounts of Eliot's view of sympathy stem primarily from the complexities of her texts, two critical trends perhaps exacerbate the difficulty. The first is formal: the tendency in academic writing about Eliot, particularly in articles and chapters, is to focus on a particular novel after developing a general account of sympathy on the basis on Eliot's essays, letters, and intellectual background.[150] This style for essay construction is understandable, as it affords the possibility of demarcating and mastering some portion of the now-massive body of scholarship on Eliot, but it has two regrettable implications. The first is that the emphasis is thus by definition on Eliot's thinking in a particular novel, and not its connections to her other novels; possible coherences between novels consequently go neglected. The second implication is again somewhat accidental, stemming from the fact that such articles often assert that a given novel complicates or questions Eliot's view. Since the same critical strategy can be (and, I think, has been) deployed on any of Eliot's novels, the overall impression is one of a writer who is always qualifying her own position, never straightforwardly discussing the value of sympathy but always negotiating tensions around it. Without disputing any particular

[149] Jonathan Loesberg, "Aesthetics, Ethics, and Unreadable Acts in George Eliot." In *Knowing the Past: Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. Suzy Anger (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2001): 121-147, 121.
[150] Most of the essays cited so far depend upon a version of this form; Jaffe, Ablow, and Nazar do so particularly clearly.

instance of this claim, it is important to keep in mind the extent to which it is a product of the formal construction of such arguments. For any thinker, a given text will always bear a slightly oblique relationship to her overall view: no work will ever coherently and completely express the views a writer holds when those are understood on the basis of her entire *oeuvre*. As a result of this concern, the arguments in this chapter will deliberately not limit themselves to particular novels, and will instead openly focus on the resonances across Eliot's work; accordingly, it will treat seeming discrepancies not as qualifications of her account of sympathy, but as developments of it.

Doing so highlights the second critical trend this chapter will resist. Suzy Anger has recently objected to the ease with which critics find Eliot disputing the ethical value of sympathy: "A tendency of many of these readings is to collapse distinctions. If Eliot dramatizes cases in which interpretation or sympathy goes awry, then she has undermined sympathy altogether. *Any* failure of sympathy is read as a questioning of the very possibility of sympathy" (*Victorian Interpretation* 114).[151] As Anger indicates, there is perhaps too much readiness to find Eliot's works as depicting the impossibility of genuine sympathy, and not enough interest in seeing the failures so depicted as components of Eliot's expression of that view.[152]

As I hope to have suggested, there is not yet a clear enough critical understanding of Eliot's ethics of sympathy in order to speak very precisely about whether her novels depict it is as possible. In other words, the question of which objections one might pose to Eliot's ethics, and the subsequent question of whether she is aware of such objections and develops

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[151] Of the readings discussed here, Anger directs her argument against Cvetkovich and Jaffe, but also cites Marc Redfield, *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), and Michael Heyns,, *Expulsion and the Nineteenth-century Novel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

[152] In saying this, I do not mean to imply that I am the only critic who avoids this impulse. In addition to Anger's own reading, see Amanda Anderson, "The Cultivation of Partiality: *Daniel Deronda* and the Jewish Question," *The Powers of Distance* 119-146.

possible responses to them, presumes a better understanding of the basic components of Eliot's view than critics currently possess. As such, the goal in this chapter will not be to pose objections to Eliot's view, but rather to reconstruct it with as much clarity as possible.

Let me briefly indicate the form that reconstruction will take through a reading of what seems to me the clearest example of sympathetic moral agency—that is, sympathy as functioning within moral deliberation—in Eliot's works. The scene is from the end of *Adam Bede*. Here, Adam finds himself in surprising sympathy with Arthur Donnithorne, the man who has seduced and ruined his fiancée, Hetty Sorrel. Specifically, Arthur is asking for Adam to help persuade Hetty's family to stay on the Donnithorne estates, instead of leaving out of indignation. The narrator tells us:

> There was silence for some minutes, for the struggle in Adam's mind was not easily decided. Facile natures, whose emotions have little permanence, can hardly understand how much inward resistance he overcame before he rose from his seat and turned towards Arthur.[153]

And Adam explains the decision thus:

> It's true what you say, sir: I'm hard—it's in my nature. I was too hard with my father for doing wrong. I've been a bit hard to everybody but *her*. I felt as if nobody pitied her enough—her suffering cut into me so! And when I thought the folks at the farm were too hard with her, I said I'd never be hard to anybody myself again. But feeling overmuch about her has perhaps made me unfair to you. I've known what it is in my life to repent and feel it's too late: I felt I'd been too harsh to my father when he was gone from me—I

[153] *Adam Bede* (New York: Penguin, 1985): 514. Further citations included parenthetically in text.

> feel it now, when I think of him. I've no right to be hard towards them as have done wrong and repent. (514)

Adam does not initially want to help Arthur; at first, he considers Arthur's attempt to help the Poysers to be a selfish way to excuse himself for doing wrong. As Adam puts it earlier, "When a man's spoiled his fellow-creatur's life, he's no right to comfort himself with thinking good may come out of it" (504). However, his sympathy with Arthur's position—manifested in his explanation that he knows what Arthur is feeling, since he knows what it is "to repent and feel it's too late"—eventually leads him to overcome his "inward resistance" and turn towards Arthur. In seeing Arthur this way, he identifies with him, establishing an affective affinity on the basis of the fact that both have repented and regretted not repenting earlier. But the identification contains also a cognitive element; Adam is parsing Arthur's motives, and recognizing that Arthur is not acting selfishly—he is not merely trying to "comfort himself," but to do genuine good on the Poyser family's behalf. In identifying with Arthur, Adam significantly does more than just overcome initial feelings of dislike: he also substantively alters his beliefs about right action. While he used to think that a man could not make up for a sin, identifying with Arthur leads him to conclude that to think this is to be too "hard" on others, and that he should not dismiss their efforts to repent so quickly.

This scene does not show, therefore, the straightforward operation of moral principle or pure sympathetic identification, but rather the two in conjunction. This tension is essential to Eliot's understanding of how sympathetic moral agency ought to function: on her view, it is important for moral agents both to construct clear identities that offer moral principles and connect those principles to specific activities in the world, and for such agents to revise those principles, or at least their application, on the basis of sympathetic identification with other people. Her argument for the necessity of both capacities—that is, a

principled self-conception on the one hand, and sympathetic fellow-feeling on the other—stems from her understanding of the psychology of wrong action. Principles and sympathy are both significant because they combat what Eliot sees as the natural human tendency towards egoistic selfishness. By positing genuine projects that have intrinsic value for the agent, self-conceptions make possible action on the basis of genuine reasons, instead of mere selfish desire. By attending to the interests of others, sympathy prevents the selfish dismissal of the claims of persons. But each is inadequate by itself: principles can be corrupted by egoism, and an agent's initially admirable work towards an end can end up being merely the need to satisfy a desire; conversely, sympathy by itself can prevent an agent from establishing a stable self-conception, and thus make it impossible for that agent to work towards any concrete good.

This basic theory of ethics recurs, I will argue, consistently and powerfully throughout George Eliot's works. While there are certainly specific scenes of sympathetic identification and particular remarks about sympathy that differ in some ways from the implications of this account, when taken as a whole the similarities and coherences that emerge in Eliot's thinking about sympathy are striking. My interpretation in service of this claim will proceed in three movements. The first will examine Eliot's discursive remarks about the nature of sympathy, particularly her suggestion—present in both her early and her late work, and running throughout the texts in between—that one of the primary purposes of sympathy is its function in "checking" doctrines. This represents, I will argue, an affective refiguration of the Kantian conception of respect, a refiguration anticipated in the way Feuerbach thinks about Kant. The second and third movements will develop each half of this dyad; more specifically, the second section will develop an account of what Eliot calls a "vocation," which transforms moral agents when they acquire it by giving them a self-

conception that contains, among other things, a doctrine of moral principles. The third movement will turn to the function of sympathy in relation to such principles: a distinction between kinds of scenes of sympathy emerges, as scenes of "sympathetic deliberation" like Adam Bede's portray sympathy differently from scenes of "sympathetic perception" and scenes of "sympathetic awakening." However, the Kantian-Feuerbachian theory remains coherent with each, with the value of personhood manifesting in different ways.

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One of the most durable claims in the critical literature on Eliot's ethics of sympathy is the idea that it represents a rejection of a rules-based ethics. Indeed, Eliot does often seem to describe sympathy this way: the necessity of sympathy for guiding and correcting the application of moral rules is a theme her narrators return to multiple times. In a famous passage from *Middlemarch,* the narrator notes the self-deceived reasoning of Nicholas Bulstrode, who has adapted his beliefs to satisfy selfish desire in believing that "money in the hands of God's servant" becomes "sanctified."[154] But Bulstrode, the narrator explains, is not exceptional:

> This implicit reasoning is essentially no more peculiar to evangelical belief than the use of wide phrases for narrow motives is peculiar to Englishmen. There is no general doctrine which is not capable of eating out our morality if unchecked by the deep-seated habit of direct fellow-feeling with individual fellow-men (668).

The *Middlemarch* narrator echoes a similarly famous passage from *The Mill on the Floss:*

> [M]oral judgments must remain false and hollow, unless they are checked and enlightened by a perpetual reference to the special circumstances that

[154] Eliot, George, *Middlemarch,* Ed. W.J. Harvey (New York: Penguin, 1965), 667. Further citations will be included parenthetically in the text.

> mark the individual lot. All people of broad, strong sense have an instinctive repugnance to the men of maxims; because such people early discern […] that to lace ourselves up in formulas of that sort is to repress all the divine promptings and inspirations that spring from growing insight and sympathy […] And the man of maxims is the popular representative of the minds that are guided in their moral judgment solely by general rules, thinking that these will lead them to justice by a ready-made patent method, without the trouble of exerting patience, discrimination, impartiality,--without any care to assure themselves whether they have the insight that comes […] from a life vivid and intense enough to have created a wide fellow-feeling with all that is human.[155]

And a similar idea appears in Eliot's nonfiction; in "The Natural History of German Life," Eliot remarks,

> If we need a true conception of the popular character to guide our sympathies rightly, we need it equally to check our theories, and direct us in their application (*Essays* 272).

All of these passages seem to suggest the importance of avoiding moral rules. Perhaps even more directly than the passage from *Middlemarch,* the narrator of *The Mill on the Floss* indicates that there is no "ready-made patent method" for making moral decisions. Such judgments will be "false and hollow"—the word "hollow" suggesting the corruption of egoism—if they are not "checked" by sympathetic identification with other persons. Given the emphasis on the importance of "special circumstances," the narrator's insistence on encounters with "individual fellow-men," and finally the eloquence and extent of the passage in highlighting

[155] Eliot, George, *The Mill on the Floss.* (New York: Penguin, 1978), 627-28. Further citations will be included parenthetically in the text.

the value of fellow-feeling, it is not hard to think that what "checked" really means here is "overcome": in other words, the ideal moral agent largely abandons ethical principles in favor of a response to particular individuals and situations.

Certainly, this is how critics have generally understood these passages. Citing the "men of maxims" passage, Jonathan Dancy calls George Eliot the "Patron Saint of 'Particularism,'" an ethics that insists on avoiding principles.[156] Similarly, George Levine writes that Eliot argues for "the inadequacy of doctrine in relation to the particularities of human life and feeling," and "protests against the rigidity of systems."[157] Suzy Anger agrees, writing that for Eliot, "One must figure things out case by case, feeling the rich particularity of each situation."[158] This aligns, moreover, with a clear philosophical tradition that emphasizes the "uncodifiability" of ethics: as recent neo-Aristotelian thinkers have argued, it is a mistake to think that there could ever be moral prodigies.[159] Learning how to apply ethical rules requires wisdom, such philosophers argue, and there is no algorithm or deliberative procedure which one can master that will yield the right answer in all cases. Instead, as Eliot emphasizes, one must be sensitive to situational details. In keeping with this understanding of Eliot, critics have generally seen her as fundamentally opposing the tradition of Kantian ethics, often held up as the defender of algorithmic ethics *par excellence*. As Annette Federico puts the point, "Eliot is not very interested in philosophical principles about how to act well," while Kant "emphasized […] applying universal law."[160]

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156 *Moral Reasons* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993): 70-71.
157 George Levine, 'Introduction." *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 1-19, 6.
158 Suzy Anger, "George Eliot and Philosophy." *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*: 76-97, 81.
159 See *On Virtue Ethics*, 61.
160 "Being Torn: *The Mill on the Floss*." *Literature, Interpretation, Theory* 12.4 (2001): 359-379, 364; 363. Critics who share this approach would include J. Hillis Miller, who contends that Eliot's aesthetic style rejects a simple belief in the clear expression of the *logos* that Kant relies on in *The Ethics of Reading* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989): 67, and Andew Lynn, whose title, "*Mr. Gilfil's Love Story* and the Critique of Kantianism," is perhaps self-evident in this regard. *The Victorian Newsletter* 95 (Spring 1999): 24-26.

Such critics are not wrong. Immanuel Kant does indeed offer a ethical decision procedure in the method of the categorial imperative, and Eliot does indeed recoil from this way of thinking about moral deliberation. But this reading is importantly incomplete: it is crucial that Eliot sees sympathy as "checking" and "enlightening" doctrines and judgments rather than replacing them entirely.[161] The value of such doctrines emerges particularly in Eliot's final rendering of this core component of her ethics, from *The Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, where the narrator refers to "the need of checks from a fellow-feeling with those whom our acts immediately (not distantly) concern."[162] Here, the emphasis is on criticizing large-scale analyses of moral actions by considering the immediate impacts of such actions; as the narrator explains,

> "Wide-reaching motives, blessed and glorious as they are, and of the highest sacramental virtue, have their dangers […] They are archangels with awful brow and flaming sword, summoning and encouraging us to do the right and the divinely heroic, and we feel a beneficent tremor in their presence; but to learn what it is they thus summon us to do, we have to consider the mortals we are elbowing, who are of our own stature and our own appetites" (98).

Again, there is a need for sympathy to balance the application of moral judgments, but the narrator's description of such judgments is significantly more charitable: rather than the somewhat pejorative term "man of maxims," Eliot here claims that such motives can be morally beneficial—indeed, they are "glorious," leading agents to "do the right." This

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[161] Though D.A. Miller sees Eliot's ethics in a way much differently than I do, on the local point about how to understand this component of Eliot's thought I am following his interpretation. As he remarks about the passage from *Middlemarch*, "Sympathetic fellowship is offered as an all-but-natural touchstone by which ideologies are tested and—at least in part—found wanting […] sympathy has a strategic double valence: far below, and therefore far above, the threshold of ideology" (*Narrative and its Discontents*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981: pp 155). Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

[162] *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (New York: Harpers, 1879. 2006): 99. Further citations included parenthetically in text.

articulation makes clear what was implicit in the formulations from *Middlemarch* and *The Mill on the Floss*: sympathy cannot replace principled moral conceptions, which remain essential to agency, but must operate in concert with them.

In keeping with this fact, portraying Eliot and Kant as simply opposed overlooks the possible resonances between their views. Recent scholarship has uncovered a Kant with much less interest in establishing clear guidelines for action, and who is rather interested in describing the ethics of decision-making as based upon a recognition of the intrinsic value of persons. Importantly, Kant thought that the primary difficulty in such deliberation was the tendency towards selfishness, which he thought individuals could overcome through the recognition of others; as he puts it at one point, "respect is properly awareness of a value which checks my self-love."[163] When seen this way, there is a close affinity between Kantian psychology and Eliot's theory of sympathy, which sees attention to others as necessary primarily because—as the description of Nicholas Bulstrode made clear—egoism can corrupt moral principles, and thus covertly serve an agent's self-love.[164] And in fact, Eliot seems to have seen Kantian ethics as centered on the value of the person rather than on the law: in her 1879 revision of G.H. Lewes *The Problems of Life and Mind,* she refers to "Kant's fine phrase, 'Man refuses to violate in his own person the dignity of humanity.'"[165]

But even if one sees Kant in this less rule-bound way, nevertheless there might seem to be a deep divide between him and Eliot on the proper way to regard the "dignity of humanity." Kant, famously, thinks that the essential moral attitude is rational respect,

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[163] Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary Gregor, ed. Allen Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 5:73. All Kant citations are to the Prussian Academy pagination. Further citations are included parenthetically in the text.

[164] However, the closeness in phrasing—both Eliot and Kant using the term "check"—is an accident of translation. The German phrase Mary Gregor renders as "check" is *Abbruch tut*. As it happens, Feuerbach quotes this particular passage from Kant in *The Essence of Christianity*, and Eliot translates the phrase as "respect *derogates* from our self-conceit" (47). Nevertheless, the relationship between the key concepts in the two thinkers—self-love, and its restraint by an attitude towards others—seems similar.

[165] G.H. Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind*, Third series, Volume IV (London: Elibron Classics, 2005): 151.

whereas Eliotic sympathy is clearly an affectively charged attitude, if not a feeling itself. Thus, even if they agree that the fundamental ethical problem is recognizing the perspective of others in such a way as to overcome selfish impulse, nevertheless they seem to disagree substantively on the proper way to so perceive other people. Again, however, recent scholarship is enlightening: David Velleman's work on love as a moral emotion points the way towards a theory of Kantian attitudes that is much more open to the idea of an affective ethics. There is, moreover, an important anticipation of this view in Eliot's intellectual history: the combination of affect and impersonality in Ludwig Feuerbach's response to Kant produces a view of love close to Velleman's, and there are echoes of these elements of Feuerbach's thought in Eliot's response to his writings.[166] My argument here will thus proceed in two steps: first, I will briefly rehearse the basic components of Kant's moral philosophy, and show how it centers on the value of the person, rather than on ethical rules as such. Second, I will to turn Feuerbach and Velleman to show how sympathy can be, like respect, an attitude towards the value of the person as such.

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[166] In connecting Eliot and Kant in this way, this chapter joins a nascent but growing tradition. In recent years, Valerie Wainwright, K.M. Newton, and Andrew Lallier have each explored Eliot's work in the light of Kantian thought.For some time, the only critic to have read Eliot's ethics alongside a Kantian framework in a more than momentary way was K.K. Collins, in "G.H. Lewes Revisited: George Eliot and the Moral Sense," *Victorian Studies* 21.4 (1978): 463-492. While the essay is an impressive piece of scholarship, the analysis of Eliot's moral philosophy is somewhat limited; Collins is particularly interested in Kant's notion that one cannot do one's duty out of inclination, and that moral value consists in acting against inclination (477), an idea he works through in a reading of Dorothea's assistance to Mr. Casaubon. I am skeptical of this way of understanding Dorothea, as will become clear below. Wainwright, however, argues that it is significant that Kant's theory of practical reason avoids the need to explain how respect for others translates into reason for action, since respect *just is* a reason for action; in her view, Eliot shares a similar approach. *Ethics and the English Novel from Austen to Forster* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2007): 131. Newton traces Eliot's reflection on the relation between freedom and determinism against a background of Kant's thinking about autonomy. "George Eliot, Kant, and Free Will." *Philosophy and Literature* 36.2 (October 2012): 441-456. See also his *Modernizing George Eliot: The Writer as Artist, Intellectual, Proto-Modernist, Cultural Critic* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011), which also reads *The Mill on the Floss* as engaging Kantian thinking about freedom. And Andrew Lallier's master's thesis, *Writing Duty: Religion, Obligation, and Autonomy in George Eliot and Kant,* Master's Thesis, University of Tennessee-Knoxville (2011): http:// trace.tennessee.edu/utk_gradthes/993, perhaps represents the fullest treatment of this particular comparison thus far, although its emphasis on Kant's philosophy of religion complicates the straightforward comparison of concepts in moral philosophy.

The condemnation of Kant's ethics as committed to an abstract system of rules stems largely from readings of his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, and in particular his famous first articulation—the "Universal Law" formulation—of the Categorical Imperative: "act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law" (4:421). The notion here, which Kant works through in a famous series of four examples, is that moral agents are supposed to ask themselves whether their maxims could be universalized, which is to say that agents ought to ask themselves whether they could will other agents to act in the way they themselves are about to. If the action is wrong, Kant's notion is that there will be a contradiction of some sort in the maxim once it is universalized.[167]

The most famous example, and the one that captures most clearly what Kant has in mind, involves the idea of a lying promise. In this example, Kant asks us to suppose that someone wonders if he can borrow money and keep it, securing the loan by falsely saying that he will pay it back. Such an agent, ideally speaking, then deliberates by asking himself if he could formulate his maxim—to tell a lie in order to gain money—as a universal law, upon which every agent in an identical situation could act. He will then see, Kant thinks, that it is impossible to even formulate such a law, because if it was clear that every borrower was happily lying, no one would ever loan money on the basis of a promise to pay it back it. Thus there is a sort of contradiction in the very universalization of the maxim; accordingly, a purely formal procedure tells the agent it is immoral to make a lying promise. And since Kant writes that it is our ability to give laws to ourselves which makes us rational beings,

[167] It is an understatement to say that there is an extensive literature on what exactly Kant means by a contradiction here. I have been guided through the literature on this topic by Christine Korsgaard's essay "Kant's Formula of Universal Law," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 66.1-2 (1985): 24-47. As she indicates, "There are three different interpretations of the kind of contradiction Kant has (or ought to have) in mind found in the literature." Each of these three interpretations – which would characterize the contradiction as logical, teleological, or practical, respectively – has a significant number of proponents, and of course there have been many rivals developed since Korsgaard's work in 1985, including much by Korsgaard herself.

"who for this reason are also called persons," on this formulation, it seems plausible to say that persons as such are of secondary importance in ethical deliberation (4:438).

But it is worth keeping in mind that this is not Kant's final word on the matter. Indeed, even in the *Groundwork* itself, he moves on to claims that offer a much different view of the relationship between the moral law and other persons. The second formulation of the categorical imperative—which occurs only a few pages after the "Universal Law" formulation—commands moral agents thus: "so act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means"—or, as he says slightly earlier, "the human being and in general every rational being *exists* as an end in itself, *not merely as a means* to be used by this or that will at its discretion" (4:429; 4:428). Here, persons, since they are "ends in themselves," assume much greater prominence.

And under this formulation, the nature of moral deliberation is significantly different. Returning to example of the agent making a false promise, Kant explains deliberation under the categorical imperative thus:

> [H]e who has it in mind to make a false promise to others sees at once that he wants to make use of another human being *merely as a means*, without the other at the same time containing in himself the end. For, he whom I want to use for my purposes by such a promise cannot possibly agree to my way of behaving toward him, and so contain in himself the end of this action. (4:430)

Note how different this is from moral deliberation under the Universal Law articulation of the Categorical Imperative. Under this formulation—the "Formula of Humanity"—the morally relevant fact has nothing to do with the agent's maxims and their status vis a vis the

law; rather, the central question is whether the agent with whom I am interacting agrees with my action. Far from being irrelevant to moral deliberation, then, persons are in fact central: I must ask myself whether other persons could agree with what I am doing with them.

And this is a view Kant maintains in his later works; for instance, in *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant claims that:

> A human being regarded as a *person*, that is, as the subject of a morally practical reason, is exalted above any price; for as a person (*homo noumenon*) he is not to be valued merely as a means to the ends of others or even to his own ends, but as an end in itself, that is, he possesses a *dignity* (an absolute inner worth) by which he exacts *respect* for himself from all other rational beings in the world. (6:435)

Here, the law goes without mention; what compels respect is the person himself. Indeed, Kant introduces a distinction in value to talk about the incomparable value of persons: ordinary things can have "prices," or exchange values, but persons are "exalted" above such categories, and possess "dignity." This "absolute inner worth" is, ultimately, that to which other rational beings must be attentive.

The tension between these differing formulations of the moral law is complicated by the fact that Kant thinks they say the same thing, and moreover that the Universal Law formulation is the one agents ought to use while deliberating.[168] These interpretive difficulties, however, should not cover up the basic fact—which Eliot recognized—that the

[168] As Kant puts it: "The above three ways of representing the principle of morality are at bottom only so many formulae of the very same law, and any one of them of itself unites the other two in it" (4:436). In the contemporary literature, the central piece of criticism on this issue is probably John Rawls' discussion of the relationship between the three formulations, published in book form in his *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), chap 3 of the Kant section.

centerpiece of the Kantian view is the value created by the dignity of humanity. As David Velleman has argued,

> Rational will therefore constitutes the person as he is in himself rather than as he appears […] if reverence for the law is in fact reverence for rational will, then it is reverence for that which constitutes the true or proper self of a person. The result is that reverence for the law, which has struck so many as making Kantian ethics impersonal, is in fact an attitude toward the person, since the law that commands respect is the ideal of rational will which lies at the heart of personhood.[169]

This is to say that criticisms of Kant's ethics as impersonal mistake his view. Once the critic recognizes that Kant means to emphasize the person as he is "in himself" rather than "as he appears" in a particular contingent form, it becomes clear that persons have an "absolute worth" that compels respect. It is this attitude which, when properly understood, just is "reverence for the law."

One might nevertheless reasonably see a tension between Eliot and Kant insofar as respect is so clearly a rational and reflective attitude: even under the Formula of Humanity, ethical engagement took the form of reflective consideration of another person's interests. Sympathy does not, at first blush, seem to function in this way. However, when we attend to the Kantian elements of Feuerbach, and the particular way Eliot drew on Feuerbach's work, it becomes clear that sympathy is closer to respect than it might at first seem.

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[169] Velleman, David. "Love as a Moral Emotion." *Ethics* 109.2 (1999), 338-374, 348. Further citations included parenthetically in the text. Velleman explains Kant's apparently dismissive attitude towards persons at various moments by arguing that such moments are meant "to rule out persons as objects of reverence *insofar as they are inhabitants of the empirical world*" (348 n.30). But in their "intelligible" aspect, as instances of "rational nature," they remain preeminent throughout Kant's works.

One of Eliot's most overt invocations of Feuerbach's ideas comes in her essay "Evangelical Teaching: Dr. Cumming." In particular, Eliot argues:

> Dr. Cumming's God […] is a God who instead of sharing and aiding our human sympathies, is directly in collision with them; who instead of strengthening the bond between man and man, by encouraging the sense that they are both alike the objects of His love and care, *thrusts himself between them and forbids them to feel for each other except as they have relation to Him* (*Essays* 188, emphasis mine).

The central critique here—that Cumming's theology is in fact detrimental, since it forces the refraction of sympathy through the interfering object of God—is drawn directly from the chapter on love and faith in Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*, "The Contradiction Between Faith and Love." As he puts the point,

> Love should be immediate, undetermined by anything else than its object;—nay, only as such is it love. But if I interpose between my fellow-man and myself the idea of an individuality [Christ], in whom the idea of the species is supposed to be already realized, I annihilate the very soul of love, I disturb the unity by the idea of a third external to us; *for in that case my fellow-man is an object of love to me only on account of his resemblance of relation to this model, not for his own sake.*[170]

As should be clear, Feuerbach is articulating precisely the tension that Eliot thinks Cumming is guilty of: insofar as Christianity forces individuals to love each other only insofar as they embody Christ, it "annihilates" the love that ought to exist between individuals without the interference of a third term. Or—in Eliot's terms—God puts himself into collision with

[170] Feuerbach, Ludwig, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Prometheus, 1989), 268. Emphasis mine. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

human sympathies insofar as he "forbids" individuals to feel for each other "except as they have relation to Him. Most significant for our purposes, however, is the slippage between Feuerbach's terms and Eliot's: while Feuerbach sees a conflict between faith and love, Eliot sees a conflict between faith and "human sympathies." What this suggests is that we ought to look to Feuerbach's conception of love as a starting point for making sense of Eliot's view of sympathy.

Perhaps Feuerbach's most straightforward definition of love in this section is this remark: "Man is to be loved for man's sake. Man is an object of love because he is an end in himself, because he is a rational and loving being" (268). To modern ears, which tend to see love as an attitude to the particular and contingent aspects of the beloved's identity, Feuerbach's claim that we love a "man" because he is a "rational and loving" being can sound a bit jarring.[171] Indeed, it might even seem empty: the suggestion that we love beings because they are loving has an air of circularity, in defining love as the response to the capacity to love. The overt reference here to the Formula of Humanity in the idea that man is "an end in himself," moreover, is not immediately comprehensible: as I've suggested, Kant is often considered the philosopher of abstract rationality *par excellence*.[172]

Provocatively, however, Velleman has recently suggested that love is in fact a disposition towards a person's self abstracted away from all its contingent properties, a fact that gives it Kantian overtones. He thus contends that love can be a "moral emotion" in the sense that it is a kind of respect: as he puts it, "I am inclined to say that love is likewise the awareness of a value inhering in its object; and I am also inclined to describe love as an

[171] Many thinkers have defended the notion that love centrally involves a partial conception of the world and an awareness of the particular, contingent aspects of the beloved; for an example that explicitly contrasts this with Kant, see Robert Solomon, "The Virtue of (Erotic) Love," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 13 (1988): 12-31, 18.
[172] This critique of Kant has been developed at length in both the Continental tradition and in analytic moral philosophy. For a particularly influential argument, see Elizabeth Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33.124 (1958): 1-16, 11. Anscombe is particularly interesting in critiquing theories of ethics that involve "self-legislation."

arresting awareness of that value" (360). Or, as he puts the point somewhat later, "when the object of our love is a person, and when we love him *as* a person—rather than as a work of nature, say, or an aesthetic object—then indeed, I want to say, we are responding to the value he possesses by virtue of being a person or, as Kant would say, an instance of rational nature" (365). On this view, it turns out, the only difference between love and respect is the relation to other emotions; love "disarms our emotional defenses" and makes "us vulnerable to the other" in a way respect does not. Both, however, are arresting attitudes towards the value of the beloved object.

This view, Velleman contends, can make sense of some of our most powerful intuitions about love. When we say we want to be loved for ourselves—loved "warts and all," loved "just for me," and so forth—what we want is nor really to be loved for the particular, contingent characteristics of our identity; as Velleman points out, "someone who loved you for your quirks would have to be a quirk-lover, on the way to being a fetishist […] Who wants to be the object of someone's wart-love?" (370). Nor do we really want to be loved for our admirable characteristics, for this would imply a sort of comparison between possible beloved objects—i.e., being loved because one is more amusing than other possible beloved persons—that is incongruous with love. Rather, Velleman argues, "what we want is to be loved by someone who sees and isn't put off by our warts, but who appreciates our true value well enough to recognize that they don't contribute to it" (370).

Now, this has not been the dominant interpretation of Kant's ethics; Velleman's works represent a significant challenge to many of the standard interpretations. However, it has a precedent, as we have seen: Feuerbach anticipates much of Velleman's view of love, and does so in a similarly Kantian tradition. With this in mind, we can return more fully to Feuerbach's "Contradiction of Faith and Love," and make sense of the broader passage:

> Man is to be loved for man's sake. Man is an object of love because he is an end in himself, because he is a rational and loving being. This is the law of the species, the law of the intelligence […] Love, as has been said, is nothing else than the active proof, the realization of the unity of the race, through the medium of the moral disposition. The species is not an abstraction; it exists in feeling, in the moral sentiment, in the energy of love […] Active love is and must of course always be particular and limited, *i.e.* directed to one's neighbour. But it is yet in its nature universal, since it loves man for man's sake. (268-269)

Feuerbach here seems to be anticipating Velleman's argument for the impersonality of love, insofar as the end of the passage argues that love "is in its nature universal, since it loves man for man's sake."[173] Notably, this is true despite the fact that it is limited to particular individuals. As such, the claim essentially argues that we love particular individuals in a universal way, which echoes Velleman's argument that when we love a person, we are valuing their personhood.

Indeed, Feuerbach's conception of the "species" captures something a good deal like Kantian personhood. For instance, if to love is to "realize the unity of the race," then it is, essentially, to realize that I—the lover—am like the beloved. But since I am essentially a rational and loving being, this is to say that to love is to realize the fact that the beloved person is also a rational and loving being. And if this is the case, we are simply saying that to love a person is to realize their personhood. Feuerbach's references to the "moral

[173] It may be worth mentioning that other sections of the *Essence* draw on Kant's second *Critique*: see, for instance, Feuerbach's discussion of the relationship we have to a morally perfect being, which, he thinks, is a "practical" conception, "calling me to action, to imitation, throwing me into strife, into disunion with myself; for while it proclaims what I ought to be, it also tells me to my face, without any flattery, what I am not" (47). In a footnote, he then quotes Kant's remark that "that which, in our own judgment, derogates from our self-conceit, humiliates us. Thus the moral law inevitably humiliates every man when he compares with it the sensual tendency of his nature" (5:75).

disposition" and the "moral sentiment" confirm this reading: as Velleman argued, love is a moral emotion, because it is a response to that aspect of persons that commands respect.

One might suspect this reading on the basis of Feuerbach's critique of reason. After all, he remarks in the appendix, *contra* Descartes: "Cogito, ergo sum? No! *Sentio*, ergo sum: feeling only is my existence; thinking is my non-existence" (285). And this might seem to indicate a suspicion of the Kantian view that humans are persons only insofar as they possess a rational will. But in his discussion of love, Feuerbach is much more sympathetic to what he calls reason:

> [L]ove is reconcilable with reason alone, not with faith; for as reason, so also love is free, universal in its nature, whereas faith is narrow-hearted, limited. Only where reason rules, does universal love; reason is itself nothing else than universal love. (257)

Or, as he formulates it somewhat later:

> Love is the subjective reality of the species, while reason is the objective reality. (269).

The key here is to recognize that while Feuerbach's view shifts the capacity to reason from the center of the subject and replaces it with the capacity to love, it does so in part by arguing that love and reason are closer to the same capacity than common sense suggests: "reason" is apparently "nothing else than universal love." The second formulation, however, captures Feuerbach's view more precisely; in the same way that for Velleman love and respect were responses to the same value, and different only in the emotional vulnerability of the lover, so love is a "subjective"—and hence affective—response to the "species," or human nature of the beloved, while reason is the "objective" awareness of the same set of features.

To return to Eliot, it is important to acknowledge that the evidence that she read Kant's moral philosophy is somewhat shaky. Certainly she read and commented on a number of his other works, primarily *The Critique of Pure Reason*, and speaks of herself as an expert reader of his thought.[174] K.M. Newton concludes from these facts that "it can be safely assumed that someone as interested in moral questions as Eliot would have been familiar with his ethical writings."[175] I am not quite so certain, but given Eliot's voracious reading habits perhaps the smart money is that Newton is correct. In any case, there is no doubt about the importance of Feuerbach to her thought; and as should be clear, the elements of the Kantian view I want to stress are in Feuerbach anyway.[176]

The upshot, then, is that it is possible to read Eliot's notion that sympathy ought to check one's judgments not as an opposite to Kant's categorical imperative, but rather as an affective version of it. Certainly, the two deliberative principles involve a similar process: her narrators do not demand that one always act on the basis of fellow-feeling, but rather claim that whatever judgment one chooses to act upon must be constrained by fellow-feeling. Similarly, Kant does not say that individuals must treat other persons purely as ends in themselves all the time, which might require working for everyone's benefit while neglecting

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[174] She refers to Kant's works a number of times in his letters and her essays, for instance dismissing Ernst Renan as someone who—she contends—knows Kant's works "only at second hand, and that inaccurately." We can rather precisely date her reading of the first *Critique* in English; Avrom Fleishmann traces it to 1855, in preparation for "Translations and Translators," her review of J.M.D. Meiklejohn's translation of that text; Eliot's review appeared in October of that year. She refers multiple times to his theoretical philosophy after this point. In "A Word for the Germans," she claims it is not indeed easy reading, but it is not in the least cloudy" *Essays* 388); in "The Future of German Philosophy," she disputes his distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments, and in the "Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton," she draws on Kant in rather a lighter fashion, remarking that "in bucolic society five and twenty years ago […] 'something to drink' was as necessary a 'condition of thought' as Time and Space." However, references to Kant's ethics are much more rare: the only direct mention I am aware of, which I quoted earlier, occurs in Lewes's *Problems of Life and Mind.*

[175] *Modernizing George Eliot*, 42.

[176] Famously, of couse, Eliot translated *The Essence of Christianity* in 1852, and read deeply in the German Higher Criticism of the Bible. See, in this regard, Ashton's chapter on Eliot in *The German Idea*; also her chapter "Life with Lewes: Weimar and Berlin" in her *George Eliot: A Life* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 108-134. Moreover, Eliot remarked, in a passage often quoted in analyses that emphasize Feuerbsach's role in her thought, that "with the ideas of Feuerbach I everywhere agree" (*Letters* II 153).

yourself; rather, his claim is that one must never treat someone as a *mere* means, and always simultaneously as an end in herself. Respect, in this sense, constrains the inclinations and maxims one chooses to act upon, but does not generate them.

Moreover, if we read Eliot's "fellow-feeling" as a term bearing a family resemblance to Feuerbachian love, then it becomes clear that sympathy and respect respond to essentially the same features of the world in constraining an agent's reasons—namely, the status of other persons as persons, or ends in themselves that are beyond price. In so responding, both sympathy and respect work to overcome the same moral failing: the tendency to privilege one's own perspective, interests, and desires. In the same way that respect constrains the man who thinks he can borrow money while lying, so sympathy constrains the man who thinks it is God's will that he steal money from those who deserve it.

In emphasizing their closeness, however, I do not mean to imply that sympathy and respect are identical, or that Kant's and Eliot's broader views are substantively the same. Sympathy remains, importantly, an instinct: while respect can function easily in reflective deliberation, sympathy does not seem capable of functioning in this way. Moreover, Kantian moral deliberation relies on the formulation of a maxim, based on an inclination, and subsequent reflection on it; Eliot's views, on the other hand, indicate that the "principles," "doctrines," and "judgments" are already given when sympathy constrains them. Making sense of sympathy requires, then, an interpretation of Eliot's account of principles, one that captures why Eliot might think they are necessary. This is the goal of the next section; as we will see, Eliot again turns out to be closer to Kant than is at first apparent.

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Perhaps Eliot's clearest explanation of the importance of moral principles comes in her novella "Janet's Repentance," in her first book, *Scenes of Clerical Life*. After admitting that

the Rev. Tryan's Evangelicalism had drawn some hypocritical followers in the town of Milby, the narrator remarks:

> Nevertheless, Evangelicalism had brought into palpable existence and operation in Milby society that idea of duty, that recognition of something to be lived for beyond the mere satisfaction of self, which is to the moral life what the addition of a great central ganglion is to animal life. No man can begin to mold himself on a faith or an idea without rising to a higher order of experience: a principle of subordination, of self-mastery, has been introduced into his nature; he is no longer a mere bundle of impressions, desires, and impulses […] The first condition of human goodness is something to love; the second, something to reverence. And this latter precious gift was brought to Milby by Mr Tryan and Evangelicalism.[177]

When we "reverence" something, and hold its pursuit up above our desires, Eliot, in the voice of the narrator, suggests that we undergo a moral awakening of sorts. To see something as worthy of devotion above and beyond whatever it offers moral agents in terms of desire-satisfaction raises such agents from a "bundle of impressions, desires, and impulses" to a "higher order of experience," which consists in "self-mastery." The narrator here goes out of the way, moreover, to indicate that it is a benefit to all moral agents: "No man" can resist the higher order of experience achieved through the "subordination" of biological desire. Such experience is so much higher, in fact, that it essentially makes moral life possible: without the "great central ganglion" created by devotion to some "faith" or "idea," agents are essentially living an "animal life," driven only by the need to satisfy their impulses.

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[177] George Eliot, *Scenes of Clerical Life*. Ed. David Lodge (New York: Penguin, 1987): 320. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

There is a Kantian flavor to the emphasis on self-mastery. Kant argues in the final section of the *Groundwork* that we act heteronomously when we act in accordance with our desires and inclinations, because our desires reflect our contingent biological nature and not our real humanity. In order to act "autonomously," which is to act in a way that is genuinely self-controlled and therefore free, we must act on the basis of the moral law, which is to say simply the law that respects our own personhood as such. As he puts it, "With the idea of freedom the concept of *autonomy* is now inseparably combined, and with the concept of autonomy the universal principle of morality, which in idea is the ground of all actions of *rational beings*" (4:452-53). Thus, Kant would agree with Eliot's notion that a reverence for something above oneself produces a kind of self-mastery; indeed, that it does so provides the grounds for his claim that one acts morally only insofar as one acts freely.

However, there is a significant split between the two on what an agent must reverence in order to achieve autonomy in this way. For Kant, it can only be the moral law as such. As the passage from *Scenes of Clerical Life* implies, this is not the case for Eliot. Her narrator is not defending Evangelicalism as the sole or only truth, but instead mentioning it as an example of a morally transformative set of principles. In so doing, the narrator suggests that any faith—in fact, any "*idea*"—can effect the relevant transfiguration. So long as it offers something to work for outside of mere self-satisfaction, reverence for any end will offer self-mastery.[178]

[178] That this is true becomes clear in a passage about the English Methodists in *Adam Bede*: "They believed in present miracles, in instantaneous conversions, in revelations by dreams and visions; they drew lots, and sought for Divine guidance by opening the Bible at hazard; having a literal way of interpreting the Scriptures, which is not at all sanctioned by approved commentators; and it is impossible for me to represent their diction as correct, or their instruction as liberal. Still—if I have read religious history aright—faith, hope, and charity have not always been found in a direct ratio with a sensibility to the three concords, and it is possible—thank Heaven!—to have very erroneous theories and very sublime feelings. The raw bacon which clumsy Molly spares from her own scanty store that she may carry it to her neighbour's child to "stop the fits," may be a piteously inefficacious remedy; but the generous stirring of neighbourly kindness that prompted the deed has a

As Eliot's thought developed, she increasingly came to understand the achievement of self-mastery through reverence for an end through the notion of a "vocation": the "moment of vocation," made famous by Lydgate's acquisition of the project of becoming a doctor—through which his "world was made new"--becomes the regular form of moral transformation (152). A famous passage from *Middlemarch* makes this clear:

> Caleb Garth often shook his head in meditation on the value, the indispensable might of that myriad-headed, myriad-handed labour by which the social body is fed, clothed, and housed. It had laid hold of his imagination in boyhood. The echoes of the great hammer […] were a sublime music to him; the felling and lading of timber […] the crane at work on the wharf, the piled-up produce in warehouses, the precision and variety of muscular effort wherever exact work had to be turned out—all these sights of his youth had acted on him as poetry without the aid of poets, had made a philosophy for him without the aid of philosophers, a religion without the aid of theology. His early ambition had been to have as effective a share as possible in this sublime labour, which was peculiarly dignified by him with the name of 'business' (283).

We see in Caleb Eliot's ideal for the way a principled self-conception can give rise to "something to live for" beyond self-satisfaction. Caleb has a frankly spiritual sense of "business": it is a "religion for him without the aid of theology." This way of putting it is key, for it suggests a principled self-conception that has not hardened into a "doctrine" or been corrupted by egoism. As such, the vocation retains its ethical effectiveness: Caleb often "shook his head in meditation on the value" of useful labor, and the rhetoric of the

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beneficent radiation that is not lost" (94). Here, the narrator is quite explicitly defending Methodism on moral grounds, while admitting its weakness as an intellectual position.

passage—the "sublime music," the "indispensable might," and so forth—functions to capture phenomenologically the world of a certain kind of labor in the value-laden way Caleb understands it. In constructing the world this way, Caleb's "business" has been the guiding principle of his actions, particularly directing his "early ambition" and his training, as well as his current work.[179]

In seeing reverential attitudes towards labor as transformative in this way, Eliot speaks to a central theme in Victorian thinking about the self. Thomas Carlyle, arguably the most influential mid-century Victorian public intellectual, famously saw work this way: in his *Sartor Resartus*, the response to the "Everlasting No" created by the threat of skepticism is to fall back on specific projects.[180] The "Everlasting Yea," which offers a "Gospel of Freedom," mandates to agents, "work thou in welldoing." There might seem to be a tension here between the idea of a mandate and the idea of a Gospel of Freedom, but it is precisely the core of the notion that submission to such a task gives a new way of being free: it offers the autonomy of self-mastery over the heteronomy that comes with motivation by wayward desire.

Carlyle returns to this idea in *Past and Present*:

> For there is a perennial nobleness, and even sacredness, in Work. Were he never so benighted, forgetful of his high calling, there is always hope in a man that actually and earnestly works: in Idleness alone is there perpetual despair. […] The latest Gospel in this world is, Know thy work and do it. 'Know thyself': long enough has that poor 'self' of thine tormented thee; thou wilt never get to 'know' it, I believe!

[179] I am disagreeing slightly here with Alan Mintz's characterization of this passage. Mintz claims that "Work is pleasure" for Caleb, and cites as further evidence Caleb's later suggestion that he would do a "fine bit o' work" for free." *George Eliot and The Novel of Vocation* (Cambridge: Havard University Press, 1978): 138. Crucially, it is not just pleasure: rather, Caleb conceives of business as worth performing for its own sake, and sees his labor as having intrinsic value.

[180] Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

> Think it not thy business, this of knowing thyself; thou art an unknowable individual: know what thou canst work at; and work at it, like a Hercules![181]

What's revealing here is the extent to which Carlyle dismisses the search for some deeper self as a fruitless task: either there is nothing there, or if there is, one can never know it. Instead, one must simply "know thy work and do it." To be idle is problematic not because of some loss to overall happiness—in other words, because your labor is necessary for full efficiency—but because, at Eliot suggests, it is in working that one gives a form to one's life.

The fact that many Victorian thinkers saw the self this way creates a profound connection with contemporary neo-Kantian thought, which has seen agents as importantly constituted by themselves, as a result of the process of developing a stable self-conception. To draw out this resonance, I want here to introduce a set of terms that will recur throughout the dissertation. Perhaps the most famous explanation of the ideas involved in this way of seeing the self is John Rawls's: he contends that moral agents form and depend upon a "conception of the good":

> [P]ersons also have at any given time a determinate conception of the good that they try to achieve. Such a conception must not be understood narrowly but rather as including a conception of what is valuable in human life. Thus, a conception of the good normally consists of a more or less determinate scheme of final ends, that is, ends we want to realize for their own sake […] We also connect with such a conception a view of our relation to the world—religious, philosophical, and moral—by reference to which the value and significance of our ends and attachments are understood.[182]

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[181] Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1858), 223.
[182] Rawls, John *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 19-20. Further citations are marked *Political Liberalism* and included parenthetically in the text.

What's important for an understanding of Eliot here is the fact that Rawls offers a framework for the idea that an agent's ends are in some sense the result of her conception of herself. As he explains, a conception of the good creates "final ends"—projects which an agent deems worthy of pursuit, above and beyond—crucially—their mere usefulness in satisfying a given desire. This is what Rawls means in saying that agents want to realize such ends "for their own sake." It is because of the intrinsic value thus posited—indeed, thus created—by a conception of the good that Eliot suggests they can be morally transformative: conceptions of the good create the possibility for unselfish action.

Christine Korsgaard has developed a version of the Rawlsian notion in specifically ethical terms (Rawls's is importantly a piece of political philosophy). She describes a "practical identity" thus:

> The conception of one's identity in question here is not a theoretical one, a view about what as a matter of inescapable scientific fact you are. It is better understood as a description under which you value yourself, a description under which you find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking.[183]

And though he would be surprised to find himself called a neo-Kantian, Rawls and certainly Korsgaard are engaging a way of thinking about the self made famous by Harry Frankfurt, who argues that the difference between an action and a mere movement—that is, between something an agent does and something that merely happens within the agent's body—depends on the extent to which the agent has "identified" with the desire.[184] Such

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[183] Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 101. Further citations are marked *Sources* and included parenthetically in the text.
[184] This view appears particularly in "Identification and Externality" in *The Importance of What We Care About* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 58-68. Korsgaard makes clear her debt to Frankfurt in *Sources of Noramtivity*, 99.

identification requires constructing oneself in such a way that the desire involved transforms into something more fundamental to the agent.[185] In this way, Frankfurt explains, identification makes a certain kind of freedom possible: he refigures the Kantian psychology of the self, linking autonomy to actions performed as a result of desires an agent identifies with, while "heteronomy" occurs when desires override an agent's identifications.[186]

The peculiar nature of the relationship I am suggesting exists between morality and a practical identity is worth emphasizing. Though, for Eliot, agents have a moral duty to form such an identity, the duties the identity generates in turn are not precisely moral. Susan Wolf usefully analyzes this distinction, in discussing three short examples (visiting a hospitalized friend, studying philosophy, and baking an elaborate dessert):

> Though at least some of these acts have recognizably moral merit and are morally preferable to others that might be as good or better for me, and all contribute in some way to my happiness—at the least, I get the felt satisfaction of being able to do what I have chosen to do—neither the moral nor the egoistic perspectives capture my perspective in acting, and if we think of them only in these terms we will miss the role such acts play in our lives. I do these things not for my sake or the world's; I act neither out of duty nor

[185] I want to acknowledge here a name that is importantly missing, and which gestures at a much different way of reading Eliot. David Velleman explicitly resist this way of thinking about the self; in his essay "Identification and Identity," he argues that Frankfurt's notion of a "motivational essence" constitutive of selves represents not an actual truth about agents, but rather a pervasive piece of wishful thinking. "Identification and Identity," in *Self to Self* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 330-360, 341. And on his—quite persuasive—reading, Kant sees this worry, which is why he situates autonomy not in a particular motivation, since these are unstable, but rather in the pure capacity for reflexive thought. I don't think Eliot saw the self as unstable in this way—to my mind, she's too invested in the transformation a vocation can bring by stabilizing a self's projects to be said to agree with this element of Velleman's view—but alternative readings are possible. Cara Weber has recently argued that Eliot saw the self as a process to sympathetically engage, rather than as an entity to identify with; see "The Continuity of Married Companionship," 496. On Weber's reading, Eliot moves significantly closer to Velleman's overall view.

[186] I am guided here by Frankfurt's discussion of his relation to Kant in "Autonomy, Necessity, and Love," in *Necessity, Volition, and Love* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 129-141.

> self-interest. Rather, I am drawn by the particular values of my friend, of philosophy, of a great chocolate cake.[187]

Wolf's point here is that we will misunderstand the nature of our actions in service of the things we value if think of them as either morally compelled or as the result of egoistic, selfish desire. Agents who conceive of something as valuable in the Wolfian way do not act on its behalf for the sake of their own desire, or for the sake of a moral obligation; rather, they act for the sake of the object itself. And in this distinction, we can see again why Eliot would think conceptions of the good or practical identities are morally enabling: in acting for the sake of the valued object, as opposed to one's mere desire, the agent experiences a morally valuable resistance to egoism, even if the action performed is not itself valuable in moral terms.

These philosophical terms—conception of the good, practical identity, and identification—are not identical, but they are importantly related, and related moreover with regards to the philosophical insight both Eliot and Carlyle demonstrate: self-mastery in service of a project offers the morally transformative possibility of autonomy through the positing of ends valuable for their own sake. While I am introducing some new terminology, furthemore, this interpretation of Eliot is essentially just a slight revision of some older ways of thinking about her works. In particular, though they use different terms, three influential readings of Eliot from the previous generation of criticism each ends up contending that Eliot's novels depict agents in the process of forming practical identities. To begin, in 1968 J. Hillis Miller argued that Eliot, along with a number of other Victorian novelists, was deeply interested in the destabilizing effect of widespread secularization. As he puts it in his discussion of *Middlemarch*:

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[187] Susan Wolf, *Meaning in Life and Why It Matters* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 51.

> Dorothea's marriage to Casaubon leads to her discovery that no man can be a god for another in a world without God […] [T]his revelation has two aspects. Both are versions of the discovery that each man is the center of his own world and makes his own subjective interpretation of it. Each man casts outward on the world patterns of value which have no existence except in his own mind.[188]

Now, what matters here for our purposes is Miller's recognition that there is no transcendant value in Eliot's novels. If value exists, rather, it is "cast outward on the world" by the individual subject, produced by a conception that has "no existence except in his own mind." What he does not emphasize is that this need not be a problem: for Eliot, such projected value is neither empty or meaningless.

Approaching Eliot from a significantly different direction, K.M. Newton argued in 1981 that the formation of the sort of projected value Miller sees has important psychic benefits. Discussing Romola's identification with Savonarola's vision of Florence, he writes:

> This is the vision for which she has been searching. Service to such a vision or ideal which is itself the objectification of moral feeling and aspiration can direct her life, interact with the energies of personal feeling but at the same time prevent it becoming over-subjective in expressing. It can channel the energy generated by impulse and also control its instability.[189]

Here, Newton is interested in analyzing the ways in which visions can guide the otherwise uncontrollable feelings and impulses of the romantic inner self. In his interpretation, the self

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[188] J. Hillis Miller, *The Form of Victorian Fiction: Thackeray, Dickens, Trollope, George Eliot, Meredith, and Hardy* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968): 118.

[189] Newton, *George Eliot: Romantic Humanist* (Totowa: Barnes and Noble, 1981): 74. Additionally: "What both *Romola* and *Felix Holt* show with regard to feeling is that it must be supported by a vision or an ideal aim if it is not to run the risk of being taken over by egoistic forces in the self […] Characters like Romola and Esther Lyon not only possess great intensity of feeling but also, in committing themselves to a social ideal, discover a vision that shapes and guides their impulses" (78).

is composed in part of widely diverging, potentially destructive psychic forces, and part of the virtue of Romola's vision is that it provides a means for keeping these impulses in check.[190] By directing them towards the fulfillment of a goal, the "vision" allows for the "channeling" of internal psychological energies. This, in turn, offers a healthy expression of what would otherwise be de-stabilizing. Crucially for our purposes, the "vision" Newton describes is essentially a conception of the good: it is the "objectification of moral feeling," and serves as a means of "directing" Romola's life through the creation of ends to work towards.

Finally, though he doesn't understand his argument in these terms, Alan Mintz tracks a specific version of this idea in his 1978 book, *George Eliot & the Novel of Vocation*. His argument, which traces the various subtle ways Eliot understands the search for and subsequent enacting of a "vocation," contends that the Victorians in general and Eliot in particular relied on a secularized notion of the Protestant idea of a calling to be a minister. This history of the concept of vocation subsequently lent a spiritual energy to the essentially worldly task of finding a profession. Crucially, however, this spiritualization was in part ethically charged; as he puts it,

> Two things, let us say, join to make up the experience of vocation: the disciplined energy of the self and the commitment to end beyond the self. Despite the anxiety that accompanied the struggle to achieve the certainty of salvation, the Puritan saint at least had in the idea of salvation a supreme goal capable of giving value to even the severest and most banal forms of energetic labor. However, as a result of the secularization of consciousness in

[190] It seems to me that it is in the sense of affect and desire as disruptive and divergent forces that Eliot's works represent the influence of Spinoza on her thought. As Isobel Armstrong puts it, on Spinoza's view "pain, sadness, with its many manifestations of hate, envy, and contempt, checks the powers of the body and restrains the power of action." "George Eliot, Spinoza, and the Emotions," 304.

> the next two hundred years, this sense of elevation and authority was eroded, and thus the fit between vocational energy and vocational sanction became increasingly difficult to maintain.[191]

Though Mintz doesn't cite J. Hillis Miller, we can see that he is attending to essentially the same problem. In the same way that Miller saw Eliot as confronting the problem of a world without God, where all value was derived from individual projections, so Mintz argues that the secularization of consciousness has rendered it more difficult for individual labor to "fit" with its sanction, which is to say that the link between an individual action and its service towards some objectively valuable end has become difficult to maintain. Yet in his notion that a vocation can "discipline" the energy of the self, we find Mintz anticipating Newton as well.

This is to say that these three critics, in different ways and for different reasons, end up thus suggesting the same thing: Eliot's novels imply that moral agents can and ought to form a certain kind of self-conception, one which posits a value in the world, which therefore enables them both to constrain potentially wayward psychic energies and to act on reasons other than mere desires. In emphasizing this, what I hope to explain is that my interpretation is not a radical revision of the critical understanding of Eliot, but rather a clarification and revision of some old insights: I want to make clear the relevance of what critics have generally understood about Eliot's thinking about vocations for our understanding of her ethics. Mintz demonstrates, for instance, the same link between a practical identity and a profession which was implied by Carlyle. The "commitment to end beyond the self.," which creates a means of avoiding egoism through the pursuit of something beyond mere satisfaction, takes the particular form of developing oneself as a

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[191] Alan Mintz, *George Eliot and The Novel of Vocation* (Cambridge: Havard University Press, 1978): 66-67. Further citations included parenthetically in text.

worker. Eliot's celebration of various working-men and dramatically charged portrayals of young men and women seeking professions thus reappear as narratives of moral transformation, for by finding a vocation, they also find a practical identity.

Eliot's male protagonists, for reasons that will become clear in a moment, often offer detailed examples of this process. For instance, at the beginning of *Middlemarch*, Fred Vincy returns from university to the town of Middlemarch to find himself rather at loose ends. His university experience (he has failed his exams, and thus does not hold a degree) has trained him to enter the Church; moreover, this is what his father wants him to do. Yet he does not feel himself fit for it, and—what's more—Mary Garth, the woman he loves, says that she could not love him as a clergyman, because she "can never imagine him preaching and exhorting and pronouncing blessings, and praying by the sick, without feeling as if [she] were looking at a caricature." Mary continues: "His being a clergyman would be only for gentility's sake, and I think there is nothing more contemptible than such imbecile gentility" (560).[192]

Instead of joining the Church, therefore, Fred becomes an apprentice under Mary's father Caleb and learns how to manage estates. Caleb's explanation of how one should conceive of one's profession echoes the theory underlying Mary's criticism of "imbecile gentility": he tells Fred,

> You must be sure of two things: you must love your work, and not be always looking over the edge of it, wanting your play to begin. And the other is, you

[192] Mary touches here on a fascinating point that I unfortunately lack the space to take up: whether all practical identities are equally valuable for each agent, or whether some people are "naturally" suited for a given occupation or activity. Certainly, *Middlemarch* seems to think that individuals do have such natures: the Reverend Farebrother tells Fred that "Men outlive their love, but they don't outlive the consequences of their [recklessness," implying that one can make irreparable mistakes in choosing a profession (547). Susan Wolf, in her work on the problem of the meaning of life, has developed a distinction between "subjective attraction" and "objective attractiveness" that is useful in understanding Eliot here: as she puts it, "meaningfulness in life [comes] from loving something (or a number of things) worthy of love, and being able to engage with it (or them) in some positive way […] On this conception, meaning in life arises when subjective attraction meets objective worth, and one is able to do something about it or with it" *Meaning in Life and Why it Matters,* 26. As Fred Vincy's narrative indicates, Eliot seems to be deeply interested in this problem: a longer treatment of Eliot's ethics might usefully take it up.

> must not be ashamed of your work, and think it would be more honourable to you to be doing something else. You must have a pride in your own work and in learning to do it well, and not be always saying, There's this and there's that—if I had this or that to do, I might make something of it. No matter what a man is—I wouldn't give twopence for him […] whether he was the prime minister or the rick-thatcher, if he didn't do well what he undertook to do. (606)

What Caleb is claiming here is that work must follow from a genuine conception of the good. As his notion that one has to love one's work reveals, for Caleb one must find the object of one's labors valuable in itself, and not see it as valuable as a means to either desire satisfaction or to some other end one holds. But the philosophical point is apparent as well in the idea that agents should be proud rather than ashamed of their labors. To be ashamed of one's labor is in part to de-value its object, and thus shame creates a disparity between an agent's labor and his sense of what is valuable.

In addition to Caleb Garth, several of the other moral agents portrayed in Eliot's work exemplify the attitude towards work Caleb wants Fred to emulate. Adam Bede, for instance, explains his religion by claiming that the Bible "says as God put his sperrit into the workman as built the tabernacle, to make him do all the carved work and things as wanted a nice hand. And this is my way o' looking at it: there's the sperrit o' God in all things and all times—weekday as well as Sunday—and i' the great works and inventions, and i' the figuring and the mechanics" (53). Adam significantly conceives of his work as charged with value, a fact he invokes a moment later, when he criticizes his fellow workmen, who cease working at precisely six o'clock, by saying that he "can't abide to see" men who stop "as if they took no pleasure i' their work" (55). This self-assured sense of value is what Fred lacks, and which

Caleb is recommending: Adam has a life of "practically energetic sentiment" in service of his carpentry. [193]

Daniel Deronda reveals the importance of such a life in recognizing that it is what he requires:

> A too reflective and diffusive sympathy was in danger of paralyzing in him that indignation against wrong and that selectness of fellowship which are the conditions of moral force; and in the last few years of confirmed manhood he had become so keenly aware of this that what he most longed for was either some external event, or some inward light, that would urge him into a definite line of action, and compress his wandering energy.[194]

What is crucial here is what Deronda is not looking for: namely, sympathy. This is a feature of his moral life that sympathy cannot address, but is in fact actively hurting; as we learn at one point, Danie1's "many-sided sympathy" "threatened to hinder any persistent course of action; as soon as he took up any antagonism, he seemed to himself like the Sabine warriors in the memorable story—with nothing to meet his spear but flesh of his flesh, and objects that he loved" (336). And Rawls and Korsgaard help us to see why: Deronda has so much willingness to share the practical identities and to recognize the conceptions of the good of other people that he is in danger of not forming his own. Doing so would, after all, entail describing some goods and actions as more valuable than others, and then working towards them; such a description, I am suggesting, is what Deronda is looking for in the notion of an

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[193] It's worth acknowledging that some of Fred's problems might stem from the fact that he was trained as an intellectual: Eliot's intellectual workers—Lydgate, Casaubon, Baldassare, and so forth—experience a much more vexed relationship between their conception of what valuable work would be and their individual labors. This distinction suggests that there is something immediately and clearly productive about the manual labor of Caleb and Adam, as opposed to the potentially fruitless studies of Casaubon and the slow-progressing work of Lydgate.

[194] George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984): 335-36. Ed. Graham Handley. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

"inward light that would urge him into a definite line of action." The definite set of purposes would offer what the narrator later refers to as "that life of practically energetic sentiment," which Daniel thinks of as "the best of all" possible lives and "for himself the only way worth living" (336). Daniel's problem has a different cause than Fred's: Daniel is too willing to share the conceptions of others, whereas Fred, especially at the beginning of the novel, isn't willing enough; to this extent, they start at opposite poles on the continuum of sympathy. Nevertheless, the problem is the same in both cases: Fred and Deronda each lack a vocation that would constitute their practical identity and guide their future actions by positing a value in them.

Similarly, *Daniel Deronda*'s Gwendolen Harleth lacks such a conception, a fact that Daniel recognizes and tries to point out to her. In one of their first substantive conversations, Gwendolen rather impatiently asks him what she should do with her life. Deronda responds, crucially, not by recommending that she be more sympathetic, precisely, but that she become invested in something outside herself: "Try to care about something in this vast world besides the gratification of small selfish desires. Try to care for what is best in thought and action—something that is good apart from the accidents of your own lot" (416). What I take Deronda to be recommending here is that Gwendolen find something valuable rather than mere desire satisfaction. He is quite open on where this value could be found: when she asks what specifically she should do, he replies vaguely with, "many things," and describes these simply as "what is best in thought and action." We can see why Deronda responds in this way; nothing in Eliot's ethics will tell an agent which conceptions of the good one ought to form, only which conceptions one ought not to choose—those that do not acknowledge the obligations due to others.

The psychology here is born out in an intriguing debate. In response to Daniel's suggestion that she is ignorant, Gwendolen challenges the logic of his suggestion that she educate herself: "It is all like a dance set beforehand. I seem to see all that can be—and I am tired and sick of it […] You say I am ignorant. But what is the good of trying to know more, unless life were worth more?" (420). In other words, Gwendolen is saying she finds life valueless, and since the claim that she ought to learn more presumably hinged on the previous claim that life is valuable and knowledge is useful for living, her feeling that life lacks value prevents the recommendation from having genuine force.

Daniel responds not by trying to prove that life is valuable in itself, but by asserting that knowledge would in fact create value—in his words: "life *would* be worth more to you: some real knowledge would give you an interest in the world beyond the small drama of personal desires […] Is there any single occupation of mind that you care about with passionate delight or even independent interest?" (421, emphasis mine). The word "independent" is crucial here: Deronda has in mind the notion of caring for something *for its own sake*, rather than as a means of satisfying a desire; this is to say that he is asking if she finds anything to be genuinely valuable. And his claim that knowledge would give her an interest in the world indicates that a more thorough conception of the world would in fact create value in it.

The example of Gwendolen, however, points to a complexity in Eliot's representation of the search for a vocation: Eliot sees a number of social constraints on the female search for a practical identity that do not pertain to men.[195]As Kathryn Bond

[195] There is an extensive literature on the conception of gender in Eliot; it need not concern us here., but I direct the reader to Kathleen Blake's review essay in the *Cambridge Companion to George Eliot* (202-225). On the specific question of vocation and gender, perhaps the most influential treatment is Kathryn Bond Stockton's *With God Between Their Lips: Desire Between Women in Irigaray, Brontë, and Eliot* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1994). Further citations included parenthetically in the text. Stockton is particularly interested in the way

Stockton puts it in a discussion of *Middlemarch*, "access to professional callings" is an essentially masculine trait (219). Eliot's sense of these constraints famously emerges in the narrative of Dorothea Casaubon. Early in the novel, the narrator describes her thus: "Her mind was theoretic, and yearned by its nature after some lofty conception of the world which might frankly include the parish of Tipton and her own rule of conduct there." Others have read this passage as indicating Dorothea's mistaken desire for messianic, world-changing efforts in her own neighborhood, but this overstates the case, I think: though she conceives of it in "loftier" terms, she is fundamentally looking for the same thing Daniel was—a sense of value in the world that will guide her actions.[196] The desire for such a sense is the best way of making sense of what she calls, in conversation with Will Ladislaw, her "belief," which she describes thus: "That by desiring what is perfectly good, even when we don't quite know what it is and cannot do what we would, we are part of the divine power against evil—widening the skirts of light and making the struggle with darkness narrower" (427).

Now, this belief is clearly useless as a guide to action: as Dorothea admits, she doesn't know in any substantive way what actually is "perfectly good'; moreover, as she implies in her claim that we "cannot do what we would," even when we do think that a given action will be worth doing, sometimes social limitations prevent us from carrying it out. In this sense, it is not a genuine practical identity. But Dorothea's belief is a useful description of the almost-religious link between values and actions practical identities provide: though again, Dorothea's terms are "loftier" than those of Eliot's characters, at some level she simply wants to attain what Caleb Garth has—a sense that her individual

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the sexual energy a vocation is supposed to constrain can instead infuse it, thus overwhelming the constraints it places on the self.

[196] For instance, D.A. Miller argues that Dorothea manifests an "anxious desire for a meaningfulness that would transfigure the socially given" (134).

labors are serving some larger, intrinsically valuable goal. Will, in fact, picks up on this feature of Dorothea's beliefs by calling it a "beautiful mysticism." I want to suggest that Dorothea's belief is in some sense the empty frame of a practical identity, without any of its necessary content: she recognizes precisely what a practical identity should do, and describes her self-understanding as such; nonetheless, her conception of the good lacks any of the specific content that would offer genuine action guidance.

Eliot's sense of the social constraints preventing the formation of coherent female identity emerges additionally in the extended debate between Tom and Maggie Tulliver over the course of *The Mill on the Floss*. Tom consistently criticizes Maggie for her lack of principle: as he puts it, "you have no judgment and self-command, and yet you think you know best, and will not submit to be guided"; more substantively, he remarks, almost with resignation, "I never feel certain about anything with you. At one time you take pleasure in a sort of perverse self-denial, and at another you have not resolution to resist a thing that you know to be wrong" (408-09). Tom is at least partially right: Maggie does have a tendency to forget resolutions, and to be led away from her "judgment" by the feelings of a moment.[197] Indeed, Maggie partly admits this in defending herself: she notes the limitations placed on her as a woman, remarking "you are a man, Tom, and have power, and can do something in the world," and thus concedes that her life lacks the direction his life has (361).

But Maggie's response to Tom goes further than this, and in so doing she points to the need to supplement one's practical identity with sympathy towards other persons. In a revealing moment, the narrator emphasizes her thoughts in the midst of Tom's criticism:

> There was a terrible cutting truth in Tom's words,–that hard rind of truth which is discerned by unimaginative, unsympathetic minds. Maggie always

[197] Correspondingly, Maggie finds herself "always wishing she had done something different" (57)

> writhed under this judgment of Tom's; she rebelled and was humiliated in the same moment […] and yet, all the while, she judged him in return; she said inwardly that he was narrow and unjust, that he was below feeling those mental needs which were often the source of the wrong-doing or absurdity that made her life a planless riddle to him. (409)

The passage indicates, of course, that Tom is one of the men of maxims. He is not completely wrong about Maggie—there is a "terrible cutting truth" to his condemnation of her lack of self-control—but he fails to sufficiently check his strict conception of how to act with a sympathetic understanding of the causes of Maggie's actions.[198] Maggie rightly notes the lack of such nuance in feeling that Tom is "unjust" to her.

A genuine vocation, therefore, is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for a moral life: practical identities require constraint by sympathy in order to direct agents properly. This constraint is in keeping with the way Eliot represented their moral value: it is telling that the narrator of *Scenes of Clerical Life* identified two conditions for goodness, and called the first one "love"; one can see love as standing in for the necessity to attend to other people. In Eliot's novels, the most obvious way vocations can fail to properly guide agents is through a resurgence in the selfish desire the vocation originally constrained; the egoist who once possessed a genuine conception of the good but who has fallen back into self-satisfaction appears repeatedly. Put differently, the novels reveal a worry about apparently intrinsically valuable ends becoming instead objects to be achieved merely for the fulfillment

[198] There is a complexity here that I unfortunately cannot fully address at this moment in the chapter. It can best be put like this: if Maggie lacks a vocation, then it might seem as if her life really is a "planless riddle." So what is it she wants Tom to recognize, if not some reasons for action that can be articulated along the lines of a practical identity? It seems to me that what Maggie wants Tom to sympathize with is precisely her ability to sympathize: she has generally been led away from her principles by her sympathetic identification with others—most importantly Philip Wakem—and this to Tom seems merely heteronomous, the product of ungoverned desire. Maggie's frustration is just that she cannot defend the action on principled grounds, but was instead responding to her sense of the interests of others.

of selfish desires. Nicholas Bulstrode's narrative offers a straightforward example of this type of moral failure. Although he is an Evangelical like Reverend Tryan, his desires have over time altered his self-conception in such a way that the conception no longer effects a moral transformation:

> The service he could do to the cause of religion had been through life the ground he alleged to himself for his choice of action: it had been the motive which he had poured out in his prayers. Who would use money and position better than he meant to use them? Who could surpass him in self-abhorrence and exaltation of God's cause? […] Also, profitable investments of trade where the power of the prince of this world showed its most active devices, became sanctified by a right application of the profits in the hands of God's servant. (667-68)

This passage narrates, from within Bulstrode's perspective, the infection of egoism and the corruption of his religion. He justifies the essentially self-interested acquisition of money, power, and social position to himself by explaining that it is better for such things to be in the hands of devout believers, and thus links the satisfaction of egoistic desire to his conception of the good. Indeed, Eliot's terminology reflects this transformation: the point at which a larger "conception" or "vocation" becomes a "doctrine" is usually the point at which it becomes corrupted by egoism.

Perhaps Eliot's most sustained examination of this problem is her portrayal of Savonarola—in his claim that the "cause of his party was the cause of God's kingdom," Romola hears only "the ring of egoism":

> Perhaps such words have rarely been uttered without that meaner ring in them; yet they are the implicit formula of all energetic belief. And if such

> energetic belief, pursuing a grand and remote end, is often in danger of becoming a demon-worship, in which the votary lets his son and daughter pass through the fire with a readiness that hardly looks like sacrifice; tender fellow-feeling for the nearest has its danger too, and is apt to be timid and skeptical towards the larger aims without which life cannot rise into religion. (501).

We see here an explanation of the tension between conceptions of the good and sympathetic fellow-feeling. On the one hand, agents cannot live merely on sympathy. As Daniel Deronda's experience shows (and as this passage explains), such lives can never "rise into religion," since no action will ever be charged with genuine value. On the other hand, a conception of the good, or "energetic belief," when lived without sympathy, can become "demon-worship," where an obsession with "grand and remote end" leads to the dismissal of the claims of specific individuals, as in the "son and daughter" who are thrown to the "fire." With this understanding of the primary deliberative function of sympathy—its ability to constrain the expression of a vocation, and to limit and alter the dictates of a practical identity—we are now in a position to make sense of just what sympathy is.

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By drawing on David Velleman and Ludwig Feuerbach, I hope to have shown already that sympathy need not be thought of as necessarily opposed to respect. In particular, by connecting sympathy to Feuerbach's conception of love as an affectively charged attitude towards the value of personhood, I hope to have motivated the idea that there is no necessary link between emotions on the one hand and the particular and contingent features of identity on the other. It is possible, as Velleman argued, to respond affectively to the abstract qualities of personhood. Unlike respect, of course, sympathy is

necessarily an instinctive response to specific situations. So, my first and approximate definition of sympathy in Eliot is this: it is an instinctive response to the value of persons as persons.

Of course, instincts respond to concrete situations, not to abstract values. As a number of critics have noted, the situation to which sympathy responds is often a "scene" of suffering. Both David Marshall and Audrey Jaffe have emphasized the theatricality of the sympathetic encounter; as Marshall puts it in a discussion of *Daniel Deronda,* Deronda is a "sympathetic spectator" of the "sight of someone suffering."[199] And a number of the most famous moments of sympathy—including the three I have emphasized here—involve a character in apparent distress. So for Eliot, it appears to be the obvious pain of another that calls for a response.

One virtue of Eliot's view is its solution to a problem in moral motivation. Part of the Kantian account of deliberation rests on the notion that agents can act purely on the basis of respect for others, but there is an explanatory gap between the feeling of respect and the motivation to act.[200] Sympathy, however, does not run into this problem, for by generating affective identifications, fellow-feeling with someone creates an inclination to assist them. A passage in *Adam Bede* expands upon a version of this distinction; in the surprising interlude entitled "In Which The Story Pauses A Little," the narrator recalls Adam remarking,

> I've seen pretty clear, ever since I was a young un, as religion's something else besides notions. It isn't notions sets people doing the right thing—it's feelings. It's the same with the notions in religion as it is with math'matics—a

[199] David Marshall, *The Figure of Theater* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986): 209-210.
[200] Iris Murdoch poses this objection in *Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. P Conradi (London: Penguin Books, 1997): 367. For a response to Murdoch from the Kantian perspective which is nevertheless sympathetic to her view, see Carla Bagnoli, "Respect and Loving Attention," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 33.4 (2003): 483-516).

> man may be able to work problems straight off in's head as he sits by the fire and smokes his pipe; but if he has to make a machine or a building, he must have a will and a resolution, and love something else better than his own ease. (226)

Adam is here pointing out a feature of motivation: namely, the fact that concepts in themselves do not motivate individuals to do anything. Rather, as Adam so succinctly puts it, agents require "feelings." This remains true even in case of moral motivation—it is necessary for agents to feel in a certain way in order to be motivated to act correctly. Similarly, a passage in *Romola* refers to this way of thinking about moral duties: the narrator refers to the "supremely hallowed motive which men call duty, but which can have no inward constraining existence save through some form of believing love" (500). It is worth mentioning that this is not quite the problem of descriptive facts as opposed to prescriptive norms; the point is not that duty doesn't exist without feelings. Rather, the contention is that there is a motivational gap between a recognition of the right thing to do and a reason to do it, which sympathy, feelings, and "believing love" address.

We can render the definition of sympathy more precise by broadening the range of Eliot's references to it. At the beginning of this chapter, I mentioned the difficulty of coming up with a definition of the term in Eliot's works: the closest she gets, I think, is a passage from *Adam Bede*, where the narrator calls sympathy "the one poor word which includes all our best insight and our best love" (520). This passage suggests that sympathy is the combination of two elements—here, love and insight. These terms correlate to attitudes elsewhere in Eliot's works: in particular, pity and compassion on the one hand, and mere awareness of the mental states of others—what T.H. Irwin called "cognitive" sympathy—on

the other hand. Significantly, Eliot often represents such attitudes as being inadequate ethical responses on their own, implying that a combination of the two is necessary.

For instance, early in *Adam Bede*, Dinah Morris goes to visit Hetty Sorrel alone, in hopes of helping her move past her "little foolish, selfish pleasures" (203). In particular, she senses that Hetty does not love Adam "well enough to marry him"; this recognition of Hetty's heartlessness "touched" Dinah 'with a deeper pity" (203). In the visit, Dinah tries to warn Hetty about forthcoming trials, and Hetty begins to cry, but Dinah misunderstands Hetty's actions as reflecting a genuine moral shift. The narrator explains:

> It is our habit to say that while the lower nature can never understand the higher, the higher nature commands a complete view of the lower. But I think the higher nature has to learn this comprehension, as we learn the art of vision, by a good deal of hard experience […] Dinah had never seen Hetty affected in this way before, and with her usual benignant hopefulness, she trusted it was the stirring of a divine impulse. She kissed the sobbing thing, and began to cry for grateful joy. But Hetty was simply in that excitable state of mind in where there is no calculating what turn the feelings may take from one moment to another, and for the first she became irritated under Dinah's caress. (206)

There's no question that Dinah has deep compassion for Hetty here; indeed, immediately after the scene, the narrator tells us that she went to her own room and "poured out in deep silence all the passionate pity that filled her heart" (206). More significantly, in speaking to Hetty, Dinah identifies with her: her efforts hinge on linking herself and Hetty under the umbrella of a "we" that is constantly encountering strife—"we set our hearts on things which it isn't God's will for us to have," "we go astray and do wrong," and so forth (205).

But these efforts are crucially ineffectual, because she does not understand what is going on in Hetty's mind: as the narrator makes clear, despite her "higher nature," Dinah lacks an understanding of Hetty's "lower nature." As a result of this gap, Dinah cannot attune her remarks to Hetty's motivation, and thus Hetty is simply confused and irritated by Dinah's attempt to identify with her.

At the other end of the spectrum, *The Lifted Veil* operates within Eliot's *oeuvre* as a sort of thought experiment about the possibility of complete insight into the minds of others, even when the capacity is dissociated from any tendency towards pity, compassion, and the affective attitudes that lead one agent to identify with another. The narrator, Latimer, can hear without any impediment the "mental processes" of others, but far from identifying with them, he experiences them as an "obtrusion"; as he remarks, they "force themselves on my consciousness like an importunate, ill-played musical instrument."[201] Latimer explains his rejection of others further:

> This superadded consciousness […] became an intense pain and grief when it seemed to be opening to me the souls of those who were in a close relation to me […] [It] showed all the intermediate frivolities, all the suppressed egoism, all the struggling chaos of puerilities meanness, vague capricious memories, and indolent make-shift thoughts, from which human words and deeds emerge like leaflets covering a fermenting heap. (14)

This passage reveals the extent to which Latimer is alienated from those around him: indeed, greater awareness has simply produced greater distance. What I want to emphasize here is the extent to which simple comprehension of others cannot be identical to sympathy: although Eliot occasionally represents her egoists as importantly blind to the mental states of

[201] George Eliot, *The Lifted Veil* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Electronic Classics, 2001), 13. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

others, the example of Latimer shows that mere "insight" is not sufficient as a moral attitude.[202]

Instead, one must combine compassion with awareness; let this be my second approximation of a definition of sympathy in Eliot. What it requires to be a full definition is a sense of what exactly the sympathetic agent's awareness of others consists in: it is not immediately clear exactly what, in comprehending the mental states of others, the sympathetic agent grasps that others do not. It is important to recall, in this regard, what Maggie Tulliver wanted from her brother Tom. She wanted him to see those facts about her actions that made her life something other than a "planless riddle": in short, she wanted him to understand her reasons. Maggie's desire is key, since it suggests that sympathy involves parsing an agent's motivations. On my reconstruction of Eliot, the need for such parsing links sympathy inextricably to the concepts of vocation and practical identity, for sympathy thus involves inhabiting the identities of others in such a way that their ends—those projects they deem intrinsically valuable, and which provide them reasons for action—become clear.

It is not surprising, therefore, that sympathy also leads to introspection and self-doubt. As Elizabeth Ermarth emphasizes, Eliot's narrator asserts in *Romola* that "It belongs to every large nature, when it is not under the immediate power of some strong unquestioning emotion, to suspect itself, and doubt the truth of its own impressions, conscious of possibilities beyond its own horizon" (244). On first blush, it might seem that Eliot is valuing self-doubt for its own sake: the argument seems to be that since one can apparently never know the "truth of [one's] own impressions," the most reasonable thing to

[202] For instance, in *Romola*; after Tito Melema sells Romola's father's library without her permission, he tries to persuade Romola that it was the right thing to do. He fails, but is unable to perceive his failure: "it was impossible for him […] not to over-estimate the persuasiveness of his own arguments. His conduct did not look ugly to himself, and his imagination did not suffice to show him exactly how it would look to Romola" (299). This correlates to Tito's developing egoism, and suggests that oftentimes moral disregard for the perspective of others is accompanied by a literal blindness to them.

do is doubt them all and suspect oneself. However, at the novel's climax Romola experiences a radical self-doubt, and the narrator's description of the experience clarifies what the process entails more generally:

> That rare possibility of self-contemplation which comes in any complete severance from our wonted life made her judge herself as she had never done before: the compunction which is inseparable from a sympathetic nature keenly alive to the possible experience of others, began to stir in her with growing force. She questioned the justice of her own conclusions, of her own deeds: she had been rash, arrogant, always dissatisfied that others were not good enough, while she herself had not been true to what her soul had once recognized as the best. (560)

Let us note a few small points initially. First, it appears that "sympathetic nature" and "large nature" are synonymous; moreover, it seems that the driving force of the self-suspicion and doubt of the first passage is the keen awareness of the possible experience of others alluded to in the second. More significantly, what counts as an "impression" is revealing: the narrator describes Romola doubting conclusions, deeds, and what are perhaps best described as "attitudes." These categories are broad enough that the only rubric under which they could all fall would simply be self-doubt generally. And finally, what motivates this self-suspicion is a "nature keenly alive to the possible experience of others," which suggests that self-doubt alone isn't sufficient. Sympathy requires us further to doubt ourselves in favor of acknowledging some aspect of another agent.

The idea of the capacity to take a perspective different than one's own finds its fullest articulation in the character of Daniel Deronda. The narrator notes at one point that he experiences, "as was wont with him, a quick change of mental light, shifting his point of

view to that of the person whom he had been thinking of hitherto chiefly as serviceable to his own purposes, and was inclined to taunt himself with being not much better than an enlisting sergeant, who never troubles himself with the drama that brings him the needful recruits" (458). This sort of shifting, other passages make clear, is at the core of what it is to be sympathetic: "His imagination had so wrought itself to the habit of seeing things as they probably appeared to others, that a strong partisanship, unless it were against an immediate oppression, had become an insincerity for him. His plenteous, flexible sympathy had ended by falling into one current with that reflective analysis which tends to neutralize sympathy" (335).[203] The Kantian implications here are clear: Daniel is worried about taking other people as means to his ends—what he calls being an "enlisting sergeant"—and what gives him such worries is his ability to shift his "point of view," which presumably makes him recognize other persons as ends in themselves and therefore not appropriate as a means to his own ends. As such, he is continually doubting himself, always ready to recognize the projects of others as more worthy of pursuit than his own.

This element of sympathy—its insistence on parsing reasons, and on identifying with them, in such a way that sympathetic agents doubt their own practical identities—is what makes it an attitude towards the person as such. In keeping with Eliot's suggestion that moral principles transform agents from an animal life of mere self-satisfaction into persons with "great central ganglions" capable of pursuing intrinsically valuable projects, to identify with someone's reasons is precisely to identify with the thing that makes her a person.[204]

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[203] As Audrey Jaffe notes (*Scenes of Sympathy* 131) and as Matt Flaherty has pointed out to me in conversation, this passage somewhat confusingly repeats the word "sympathy"—indeed, it suggests that sympathy neutralizes itself. I will return to this issue in the conclusion to this chapter.

[204] It is in the sense of impartiality here—the idea that sympathizing with an agent involves the sense that there ends are praiseworthy from a perspective outside their own—where I would see the relevance of Adam Smith's thought for Eliot's view. The notion involved in his "rational spectator" is not so very different from the reading I have laid out here; see Rae Greiner, "Sympathy Time," for a discussion of Eliot that draws on this aspect of Smith's thought.

Thus, my final approximation of a definition of sympathy in Eliot is that is a combination of instinctive compassion towards other persons with an awareness of them, where that awareness entails a grasp of their motivations for action and a discernment as to whether their actions are driven by reasons or selfish desires.

With this framework in place, we are now in a position to return to the crucial scene from *Adam Bede* with which I opened this chapter. Let us recall that Arthur Donnithorne, after impregnating and abandoning Hetty Sorrel, comes to Adam, his former friend and Hetty's fiancée. Arthur is deeply repentant, and seeks Adam's help in persuading Hetty's family, the Poysers, to stay on the Donnithorne estates rather than leaving in protest of Arthur's actions. Arthur himself is joining the army, hoping that by moving himself he will prevent others from having to move. As he puts it to Adam, "one of my reasons for going away is, that no one else may leave Hayslope—may leave their home on my account. I would do anything, there is no sacrifice I would not make, to prevent any further injury to others through my—through what has happened" (511).

Now as it happens, this project runs afoul of a principle Adam holds deeply. As he puts it to his friend Bartley Massey:

> 'Good come out of it!' said Adam passionately. 'That doesn't alter th' evil: [Hetty's] ruin can't be undone. I hate that talk of people, as if there was a way o' making amends for everything. They'd more need be brought to see as the wrong they do can never be altered. When a man's spoiled his fellow-creatur's life, he's no right to comfort himself with thinking good may come out of it: somebody else's good doesn't alter her shame and misery. (504)

In other words, Adam holds that to think good can come out of evil is to excuse oneself for one's evil actions; agents ought rather to "see as the wrong they do can never be altered."

When Arthur asks for Adam's help, this principle causes Adam initially to reject Arthur's request:

> Adam thought he perceived in [Arthur's words] that notion of compensation for irretrievable wrong, that self-soothing attempt to make evil bear the same fruits as good, which most of all roused his indignation. He was as strongly impelled to look painful facts right in the face, as Arthur was to turn away his eyes from them […] He felt his old severity returning as he said, 'The time's past for that, sir. A man should make sacrifices to keep clear of doing a wrong; sacrifices won't undo it when it's done. (511-12)

What's crucial here is the emphasis on reasons for action. Adam criticizes the principle of "evil coming from good" because he thinks of it as stemming essentially from egoism; as the narrator puts it in the rejection of the request, Adam thinks of it as "self-soothing." A distinction here emerges, following the distinction between acting on egoistic desire and acting on the basis of a genuine conception of the good. Adam's eventual decision to help Arthur persuade the Poysers to stay rests on Arthur's demonstration that he is not merely acting on selfish impulse.

Arthur demonstrates this first through an argument that he is giving up a great deal of happiness—in his words, the action "cuts off every piece of happiness I've ever formed" (513). He then defends the notion of the Poysers' remaining as a good thing, remarking, "it is impossible for a sensible man like you to believe there is any real ground for the Poysers refusing to remain," and claims that Adam will be serving their good, not Arthur's own: "You know that's a good work to do for the sake of other people, besides the owner." This combination of repudiated egoism—the action is not for Arthur's own happiness—and endorsed value—the action will be for the good of other people—begins to tell on Adam,

who cannot "help being moved." Furthermore, "it was impossible for [Adam] not to feel that this was the voice of the honest, warm-hearted Arthur whom he had loved and been proud of in the old days."

But this is not quite sufficient to persuade Adam to help. What finally convinces him is Arthur's appeal to Adam's ability to imagine the perspective of someone deeply repentant. This appeal comes in three stages: Arthur first claims, "I wouldn't act so towards you, I know. If you were in my place and I in yours, I should try to help you to do the best." Adam moves a bit in his chair, and Arthur continues: 'Perhaps you've never done anything you've had bitterly to repent of in your life, Adam; if you had, you would be more generous. You would know then that it's worse for me than for you" (513-14). After this remark, Adam gets up and looks out a window. Arthur finishes by saying: "Haven't I loved her too? Didn't I see her yesterday? Shan't I carry the thought of her about with me as much as you will? And don't you think you would suffer more if you'd been in fault?" (514)

The narrator makes it clear that it is Adam's contemplation of this remark that constitutes his deliberation about whether to accede to Arthur's request:

> There was silence for some minutes, for the struggle in Adam's mind was not easily decided. Facile natures, whose emotions have little permanence, can hardly understand how much inward resistance he overcame before he rose from his seat and turned towards Arthur. (514)

Equally crucial is Adam's explanation of his decision:

> It's true what you say, sir: I'm hard—it's in my nature. I was too hard with my father for doing wrong. I've been a bit hard to everybody but *her*. I felt as if nobody pitied her enough—her suffering cut into me so! And when I thought the folks at the farm were too hard with her, I said I'd never be hard

> to anybody myself again. But feeling overmuch about her has perhaps made me unfair to you. I've known what it is in my life to repent and feel it's too late: I felt I'd been too harsh to my father when he was gone from me—I feel it now, when I think of him. I've no right to be hard towards them as have done wrong and repent. (514)

We see here a clear depiction of sympathy in its deliberative function. Adam has questioned himself in the same sort of self-doubting way the passage from *Romola* suggested for sympathetic agents. Moreover, the self-doubt rose from the recognition of another's perspective, in the same way Deronda's does; here, Adam's recognition of Arthur's repentant perspective causes him to abandon his doctrine about "evil coming from good," and instead claim "I've no right to be hard towards them as have done wrong and repent." This recognition crucially involves an understanding of the link between repentance and subsequent action, and it is in this understanding that Adam's sympathy truly takes hold: Adam recognizes that Arthur is not in fact acting out of egoistic impulse, but instead out of a genuine belief in the goodness of the action of helping convince the Poysers to stay. It was his refusal to see this that constituted his "unfairness" towards Arthur. Significantly, this shift both causes and is caused by Adam's identification with Arthur: it is a constitutive feature of Adam's compassion that he sees how he has been in Arthur's shoes—shoes that led him to conclude he "would never be hard again."

A similar process occurs in Caleb Garth's decision to help Fred Vincy find a career as an estate manager—that is, in Caleb's own "business." Caleb justifies the decision to his wife as follows:

> 'It's a fine thing to do,' said Mr. Garth, settling himself firmly against the back of his chair, and grasping the elbows. 'I shall have trouble with him, but

> I think I shall carry it through. The lad loves Mary, and a true love for a good woman is a great thing, Susan. It shapes many a rough fellow.' (609)

Now, admittedly, Caleb Garth is not modifying a doctrine in precisely the same way Adam Bede did, and thus the element of self-questioning is missing. But his decision to support Fred is justified by essentially the same sort of reasoning: Caleb decides to help Fred as a result of the fact that his love for Mary represents something he cares about outside of himself, and thus Caleb will not be helping Fred merely satisfy egoistic desire. Caleb refers to this implicit moral psychology in his claim that "a true love for a good woman is a great thing," and that it "shapes many a rough fellow": such love represents a step outside of oneself. It is not precisely a conception of the good; recall that in the passage from Scenes *of Clerical Life* Eliot distinguished finding "something to love" from finding "something to reverence." But it is nevertheless something other than basic biological desire.[205]

Subsequent remarks in the conversation support this understanding of Caleb's deliberation. Mrs. Garth objects to his decision by pointing out that Mary might have been able to marry Mr. Farebrother, who is "worth twenty Fred Vincys." Caleb's reaction is revealing:

> Caleb was silent for a few moments under a conflict of feelings. He looked at the floor and moved his head and hands in accompaniment to some inward argumentation. At last he said—'That would have made me very proud and happy, Susan, and I should have been glad for your sake. I've always felt that

[205] I am drawing here in part on Melissa J. Ganz's fascinating essay "Binding the Will: George Eliot and the Practice of Promising." Ganz points out how significant Mary Garth's promise to Fred is in creating something for him to pursue outside of egoism; in her words, "When Fred thinks of her and of her opinion of him, he reins in his erring passion. Mary's condition pledge thus effects an important change in Fred: it gives him a reason to consider someone's perspective other than his own" (583).

> your belongings have never been on a level with you. But you took me, though I was a plain man.' (609)

Mrs. Garth objects to Caleb's self-deprecating remarks, claiming that she "took the best and cleverest man I had ever known"; the narrator explains that Mrs. Garth was "convinced that *she* would never have loved any one who came short of that mark." Then Caleb continues:

> Well, perhaps others thought you might have done better. But it would have been worse for me. And that is what touches me close about Fred. The lad is good at bottom, and clever enough to do, if he's put in the right way; and he loves and honors my daughter beyond anything, and she has given him a sort of promise according to what he turns out. I say, that young man's soul is in my hand; and I'll the best I can for him, so help me God! It's my duty, Susan. (609).

Now this is an odd sort of response to Susan's suggestion that Mary might have married Farebrother. Caleb is surprised by the suggestion, and clearly some sort of internal debate occurs; he is "silent for a few moments under a conflict of feelings." But when he speaks, he acknowledges the value of the potential match not on behalf of Mary, who would presumably be the primary beneficiary of a marriage between herself and Mr. Farebrother, but on behalf of Susan: he tells her he "would have been glad for your sake." What's revealing here is what Caleb is *not* doing: namely, calculating whether a marriage between Mary and Farebrother would be better than a marriage between Mary and Fred.

Instead, Caleb uses his wife's remark to draw a connection between himself and Fred, in a way similar to Adam Bede's connection between Arthur's repentance and his own feelings after the death of his father. In identifying with Fred, Caleb looks past Fred's egoistic mistakes to perceive his true status as a person; in Caleb's terms, Fred is "good at

bottom," and "loves and honors" Mary "beyond anything." This fact apparently generates an obligation: Caleb takes on Fred's ends as his own, thinking that Fred's "soul is in [Caleb's] hand." The difference between this phrasing and a consequentialist justification is revealing: Caleb has *not* said, "Well, Mary loves him, and she'll be better off if Fred finds a vocation, so I'm going to help him find a trade." Instead, his statement, reduced to its simplest form, is "Fred loves Mary, and that is a valuable end to pursue; she has only agreed to accept him if he finds an effective trade, so I have a duty to assist him in realizing his vocation."

Now, these two scenes—Arthur-Adam and Caleb-Fred, or more precisely Caleb-Mrs. Garth—show moral agents deciding to work towards someone else's ends upon recognizing the extent to which those ends are not merely the result of egoistic desire. There is, however, an obvious corollary to this particular situation: namely, an agent who decides *not* to work towards someone else's ends upon recognizing the fact that they are the result of egoistic desire. This is the pattern followed by one of the most complex and extended acts of moral deliberation in Eliot's novels: Dorothea Casaubon's decisions regarding her husband's requests about his opus, *The Key to All Mythologies*.

As we saw earlier, Dorothea begins the novel looking for a "larger conception," which would provide meaning to her life. She marries Casaubon because she believes she will be able to find this meaning in service to him and his scholarly work. As she puts it to herself at one point, in such a marriage "there would be nothing trivial about our lives. Everyday-things with us would mean the greatest things. It would be like marrying Pascal" (51). What's crucial here for our purposes is Dorothea's belief that Casaubon himself is a great scholar, living a life devoted to the pursuit of intellectual truth. This truth, being intrinsically valuable in Dorothea's (and presumably Casaubon's) conception of the world,

thereby lends meaning to efforts to pursue it, which would make Casaubon's life, and Dorothea's by extension, non-"trivial."

Tragically, of course, Casaubon is not in fact selflessly devoted to the pursuit of truth; instead, his conception of the good is deeply corrupted by egoism. This becomes clear in a famous passage from the narrator:

> It is an uneasy lot at best, to be what we call highly taught and yet not to enjoy: to be present at this great spectacle of life and never to be liberated from a small hungry shivering self—never to be fully possessed by the glory we behold, never to have our consciousness rapturously transformed into the vividness of a thought, the ardor of a passion, the energy of an action, but always to be scholarly and uninspired, ambitious and timid, scrupulous and dim-sighted. (314)

What is crucial here is the narrator's description of Casaubon as lacking a genuine conception of the good. Such a conception would, after all, "rapturously transform" Casaubon's life by providing the possibility for "the energy of an action" or "the ardor of a passion." There is a clear opposition here between such a conception and egoism: if he were possessed by a genuine "glory," the narrator claims, this would "liberate" him from his "small hungry shivering self." Casaubon's scholarly work, therefore, does not in fact represent service toward some larger good outside himself; instead, it is merely in service of selfish impulse.

Dorothea's inability to perceive this is made clear in another famous passage:

> We are all of us born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves: Dorothea had early begun to emerge from that stupidity, but yet it had been easier to her to imagine how she would devote herself to

> Mr. Casaubon, and become wise and strong in his strength and wisdom, than to conceive with that distinctness which is no longer reflection but feeling—an idea wrought back to the directness of sense, like the solidity of objects—that he had an equivalent centre of self, whence the lights and shadows must always fall with a certain difference. (243)

This is a dense passage, but a few of its claims are straightforward. First, the novel unequivocally characterizes Dorothea as caught in egoism; though she has started to emerge from it, she remains partially caught in "moral stupidity," viewing the world only insofar as it "feeds" her supreme self. Dorothea sees the world as it can fulfill her needs, which the description of her view of Mr. Casaubon clarifies. She perceives him, the narrator tells us, as "wise and strong," which fulfills her need for an object worthy of devotion and her desire to be wise and strong herself.

The difficulty comes in understanding the second half of the passage, where the narrator explains what a sympathetic perception of Mr. Casaubon would entail. This would be to "conceive with a distinctness which is no longer reflection but feeling," an act of conceiving that apparently produces "an idea wrought back to the directness of sense, like the solidity of objects," the fact that he has "an equivalent centre of self." One might suggest that what Dorothea doesn't recognize is Casaubon's conception of the good, but this isn't quite right; rather, what Dorothea doesn't recognize is the way in which his conception of the good is in fact imbricated with his egoism. One can describe this as claiming that Dorothea doesn't recognize the way in which Casaubon's reasons are generated: she takes him to be acting selflessly in service of an intellectual project, whereas, as we have seen, he is actually acting selfishly in service of his own desires.

Dorothea achieves a correct perception of Casaubon slowly, only achieving it fully after his death. Her perception of Casaubon's egoism begins first with her recognition of the futility of his scholarly project, an insight spurred by Will Ladislaw's explanation of Casaubon's failure to follow the latest German scholarship in his area of study (254). This perception renders all the more problematic his request that she follow his wishes in the event of his death, without knowing precisely what those wishes might be (519). Dorothea does not immediately accede to the request, but asks for a night to consider her response. The factors that press on her decision are revealing for our understanding of sympathetic deliberation.

On the one hand, Dorothea is inclined to refuse the request because of the fruitless nature of Casaubon's labors, which she expects she will be required to continue. Thus: "And had she not wished to marry him that she might help him in his life's labors?—But she had thought the work was to be something greater, which she could serve in devoutly for its own sake. Was it right, even to soothe his grief, would it be possible, even if she promised—to work in a treadmill fruitlessly? (520). We should note here Dorothea's belief that she would have been willing to work on Casaubon's project if it had been possible to serve it "for its own sake." Unfortunately, she no longer sees it as valuable.

On the other hand, she deeply pities Casaubon, and recognizes that to refuse him would be to hurt him: "if she were to say, 'No! If you die, I will put no finger to your work'— [it] seemed as if she would be crushing that bruised heart." And it is this fact that ultimately compels Dorothea to comply with Casaubon's request; as the narrator puts it, "Neither law nor the world's opinion compelled her to this—only her husband's nature and her own compassion […] She saw clearly enough the whole situation, yet she was fettered: she could not smite the stricken soul that entreated hers" (523). In other words, Dorothea

feels she must work towards Casaubon's ends, even though she no longer thinks of them as valuable in themselves.

Now, this would appear to be a stereotypical moment of sympathy, but it is crucial, I think, that this is not the word the narrator uses: instead, the passage speaks rather of Dorothea's "compassion" and "pity." This is because Dorothea has not properly understood her husband, and thus does not genuinely sympathize with him; furthermore, she can longer identity with his ends. To the extent that she feels sorry for him, she does not love him the way Feuerbach argues one ought: caring only about his "bruised heart" is not a perception of Casaubon's whole person. It is ironic that Casaubon famously has "two white moles with hairs on them," for Dorothea's pity is something akin to Velleman's wart-loving fetishist (42). She does not see the whole situation "clearly enough"; specifically, she does not understand her husband's jealousy about her relationship with Will Ladislaw. Dorothea thus misses the fact that Casaubon's request will be in part an attempt to restrain her from further companionship with Will. The narrator hints at this possibility and its rejection in Dorothea's mind:

> But—the thought passed through her mind more than once, though she could not believe in it—might [Casaubon] not mean to demand some thing more from her than she had been able to imagine, since he wanted her pledge to carry out his wishes without telling her exactly what they were? No, his heart was bound up in his work only: that was the end for which his failing life was to be eked out by hers. (521)

Crucially, she is mistaken: Casaubon's heart is not "bound up in his work only."[206]

[206] This interpretation is in disagreement on a number of fronts with Amy Kass's recent essay, "Sympathy, Love, and Marriage: Effective Reform in Middlemarch" (Lecture presented March 13, 2010, for "Winter Weekend on Middlemarch," sponsored by the Maine Humanities Council and the National Endowment for

This becomes clear to Dorothea when, after hearing of Casaubon's will and its codicil disinheriting her if she marries Will Ladislaw, she perceives Casaubon in a way she never did while he was alive. The narrator tells us: "One change terrified her as if it had been a sin; it was a violent shock of repulsion from her departed husband, who had had hidden thoughts, perhaps perverting everything she said and did" (532). After the shock of this repulsion, Dorothea can see Casaubon's request for what it is: a "promise by which he sought to keep his cold grasp on Dorothea's life" (535). Furthermore, the narrator explains:

> [N]ow her judgment, instead of being controlled by duteous devotion, was made active by the imbittering discovery that in her past union there had lurked the hidden alienation of secrecy and suspicion. The living, suffering man was no longer before her to awaken her pity; there remained only the retrospect of painful subjection to a husband whose thoughts had been lower than she had believed, whose exorbitant claims for himself had even blinded his scrupulous care for his own character. (535)

Without her pity clouding her judgment, Dorothea can see Casaubon for who he is: an egoist whose "exorbitant claims for himself" had corrupted his ethically motivated "care for his own character." There is an implication here: if Dorothea had perceived Casaubon correctly before his death, she would not have been willing to comply with his request. And thus the conclusion of this deliberation, which has achieved something like sympathy by the end, is not an identification with her husband but rather a complete rejection of him.

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the Humanities, at Bowdoin College. Available at www.hudson.org). I mention it here because Kass alludes to an interpretation of Dorothea that speaks to a larger issue. I quote from Kass's reading of Dorothea's deliberation upon learning of her husband's medical condition: "It is here that Dorothea's true agony begins. For only now does she understand how difficult it is genuinely to care for another "centre of self." Only now does sympathy become her vocation. As with her earlier misguided longings, so here with her call to sympathy, Dorothea's ardent passions will be painfully educated" (7). What's important here for our purposes, insofar as it presses an important objection to my view, is the notion that sympathy can itself be a vocation—can itself form a conception of the good. The error in this view becomes clear when we remember what a vocation does, in Eliot's novels (as laid out by Mintz): it provides meaningful work and a sense of value.

The point here is to be a rational response to a person as such—to be a genuine discernment of an agent's reasons—sympathy cannot always simply produce altruistic action. Rather, while leading a agent to act on another's behalf when his motivations are driven by a conception of the good, sympathetic deliberation—in order to be actual deliberation—must lead an agent to reject altrustic action upon discerning that another agent's motivations are not driven by a conception of the good, but are in fact selfish and egoistic. If Adam Bede's actions exemplify the former, I hope to have suggested that Dorothea's thinking about her husband's requests ultimately demonstrate the latter.

Let me take a step back and offer two observations about this way of reading Eliot and this theory of deliberation. First, although the point is perhaps obvious, it's worth acknowledging that this view is in deliberate contrast to the consequentialist theory of deliberation essential to utilitarian thought, where deciding on the right thing to do involves assessing the positive or negative consequences of various alternatives. Eliot's narrators universally criticize such forms of deliberation; Eliot's irony in this passage from *Brother Jacob* is characteristic:

> David was by no means impetuous; he was a young man greatly given to calculate consequences, a habit which has been held to be the foundation of virtue. But somehow it had not precisely that effect in David: he calculated whether an action would harm himself, or whether it would only harm other people. In the former case he was very timid about satisfying his immediate desires, but in the latter he would risk the result with much courage.[207]

Here, Eliot portrays the calculation of consequences as a form of deliberation that licenses egoism. This is not, moreover, the only argument Eliot's texts offer in support of her view;

[207] *Brother Jacob and The Lifted Veil* (London: Biblios, 2010): 86. Further citations included parenthetically in text.

in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, the narrator remarks at one point that acts of caring for the sick are "offices that demand no self-questionings, no casuistry, no assent to propositions, no weighing of consequences" (324). Instead, "the moral relation of man to man is reduced to its utmost clearness and simplicity: bigotry cannot confuse it, theory cannot pervert it, passion, awed into quiescence, can neither pollute nor perturb it." Here again, Eliot's narrator rejects the weighing of consequences; to deliberate in this way is to be a "casuist." Instead, one ought to act "clearly and simply," without self-question or "assent to propositions," since such direct action will not be affected by "bigotry," "theory," or "passion." Paralleling the rejection of consequentialist deliberation, Eliot appears to be rejecting the notion of any abstract decision procedure or principled way of reconciling the claims of others. Instead, one must trust to sympathetic encounters with the other agents one meets while carrying out one's vocation.[208]

Second, there is an obvious problem with this way of understanding Eliot's conception of sympathy: namely, it seems to imply that it is impossible to sympathize with agents who lack practical identities. One can certainly pity them—as Dinah pities Hetty—but it is not clear what, on my view, sympathetic awareness of an agent who genuinely lacked a conception of the good would involve. I want to conclude this section by trying to address this issue, which it seems to me is at the center of what one might call scenes of sympathetic *perception*. Unlike scenes of sympathetic deliberation, which center on one agent sympathizing

[208] This puts Eliot in an interesting position on moral dilemmas, since her ideal moral agents have no principled way to resolve the situation. Mary Garth's situation in Chapter 33 of *Middlemarch*, where she must choose whether to follow Featherstone's instructions on burning his will, presents an interesting example of this problem, and it is noteworthy for our purposes that the narrator explains that only after she has acted does she question "those acts of hers which had come imperatively and excluded all question in the critical moment" (318). Even in dilemmas, then, Eliot's ideal still appears to emphasize moral instinct and dismiss reflection: "all questions," after all, were excluded from Mary's thinking in the moment of decision. As I suggested in the introduction to this dissertation, this scene points to a complex analysis of moral responsibility, insofar as Mary feels a certain kind of guilt over the unintended consequences of her actions. Although the question of responsibility is athwart my purposes here, the fact that Mary worries about such a situation at all is proof of her capacity to sympathize—it is because she can imagine Fred's situation that her regrets appear in the first place.

with another and subsequently deciding to act, scenes of sympathetic perception involve a sympathized-with agent recognizing the fact of sympathy.[209]

The fact that the emphasis switches in this fashion points to why sympathy with agents who lack vocations is difficult to understand: part of the complexity of Eliot's representation of sympathy emerges from the fact that her narratives are just as interested in the mind of the agent receiving sympathy as they are in the mind of the agent extending it. In particular, sympathy seems to exert a sort of normative pressure: a famous scene from *Adam Bede*, where Dinah approaches Hetty in the prison after Hetty's conviction for the murder of her baby, exemplifies the effects of such forceful fellow-feeling. Dinah presses Hetty to admit to her crime and confess her responsibility: "Hetty, you are shutting up your soul against [God], by trying to hide the truth. God's love and mercy can overcome all things—our ignorance, and weakness, and all the burthen our past wickedness—all things but our willful sin" (495). And this pressure is effective: Hetty does eventually explain to Dinah how she left the baby to die. However, the act of confession is also a relief, insofar as Hetty's heart, which is "hard" when Dinah begins praying with her, "gives way" eventually; this process corresponds to Hetty's outburst of tears, which appear to have been pent up (494-500).

As such, it is difficult to understand how deliberation is functioning in Dinah's mind: the narrative is more interested in the transformation of Hetty. Indeed, the moment of sympathy is commensurate both with Hetty's outburst of speech—she finally tells the story of the death of her child—and with her domination of the story: after finally saying "I will speak," the novel permits no other intrusion until Hetty concludes "now I've told

[209] It is worth mentioning that these examples are central to Nazar's account, which emphasizes the positive effects of being perceived within the "species narrative," or—in my terms—being treated as a genuine person, and this aspect of my interpretation is indebted to her analysis (309-310).

everything," and Dinah says "let us pray." But it may be possible to infer something from the nature of the normative pressure: one might say that in such moments, a sympathetic agent identifies not with another person's conception of the good—there is no such conception there, after all—but rather with her capacity to have such a conception, her ability to be a better person than she is. Of course this identification must lack content, and so it takes less the form of shared sense that something is valuable and shifts instead to a sort of trust: the sympathizing agent manifests hope and faith, believing without evidence that the other person can be the kind of agent to whom something is valuable. There is a tension here between discernment and trust: ordinary deliberative sympathy seems to involve the recognition of egoism, yet the trust of sympathy with agents who lack vocations seems to require the dismissal of such facts. Yet this is what Eliot's texts imagine: Dorothea's "simplicity," which holds "up an ideal for others in her believing conception of them," is "one of the great powers of her womanhood"; similarly, it is Romola's simplicity that gives her the the aura of "noble womanhood" (*Middlemarch* 829; *Romola* 95). [210]

A series of famous scenes at the end of *Middlemarch* dramatize this process. First, Dorothea Casaubon's affection exerts a considerable pressure on Will Ladislaw. The narrator explains:

> There are natures in which, if they love us, we are conscious of having a sort of baptism and consecration: they bind us over to rectitude and purity by their pure belief about us; and our sins become that worst kind of sacrilege which tears down the invisible altar of trust. 'If you are not good, none is good'—those little words may give a terrific meaning to responsibility, may hold a vitriolic intensity for remorse. (829)

[210] The reason the connection is not clear is that trust seems to depend on reversing the sort of insight that was central to sympathy in the first place. I shall return to this tension at the end of the essay.

Here, the mere fact that Dorothea believes the best about Will—in other words, the evidence of her sympathetic perception of him—dramatically intensifies the force of the ethical injunctions that obtain on him. The power of this force testifies, I think, to the effects of being genuinely treated as an end in oneself. The notion that love could be baptizing is reminiscent of Velleman's argument about the way love is a kind of perception—one that acknowledges but sees past one's warts to the person beyond them. But "baptism" and "consecration" indicate that the other person is somehow made better, transformed through being held to a higher standard, simply by being loved. To the agent who has not yet found a conception of the good—and Will spends much of the novel searching for a vocation—such affection creates a pressure to be more than a mere egoist, and to act for something outside himself. It is through such pressure that loving agents' "pure belief about us" binds "us over to rectitude and purity": acting badly, out of egoistic desire, becomes in some sense a betrayal of the lover.

Of course, the most dramatic instance of this sort of sympathy occurs in Dorothea's encounter with Rosamond Vincy. Perhaps the oddest feature of this scene, as D.A. Miller notes, is the way Dorothea's sympathy compels Rosamond to act: in explaining that Will is not in love with her (and is really in love with Dorothea), Rosamond begins "under the subduing influence of Dorothea's emotion"; moreover, the narrator explains, Rosamond's generous action "was a reflex" of Dorothea's "own energy" (856; 857).[211] But if Dorothea has subdued Rosamond, she has done so in a way significantly different from the method Dinah used on Hetty: rather than directly asking her to confess her sin, Dorothea has instead stunned Rosamond precisely by treating her as if she has acted rightly all along. It is Dorothea's "self-forgetful ardour," expressed in her refusal to be jealous of Will Ladislaw's

[211] D.A. Miller, "Narrative and its Discontents," 184.

affection for Rosamond, that makes Rosamond feel a "bashful timidity" (853). More specifically, and crucially, Dorothea seeks to identify with Rosamond, drawing on her own failed marriage: she "dreads speaking as if she herself were perfection addressing error," and thus links herself with Rosamond in seeing both as suffering from the "awful" fact of the "nearness" of marriage. What makes this a kind of faith, it seems to me, is precisely Dorothea's knowledge that Rosamond has been flirting with men outside her marriage; thus, in treating her as if she has been acting well, Dorothea manifests a belief in Rosamond that runs deliberately counter to the evidence. This faith is literally painful: it strikes Rosamond with "an overmastering pang," and it is possible to see why. Dorothea respects her capacity for rational action in regarding her as if she has not treated Lydgate badly, and such regard brings her egoism home all the more powerfully.

The claim that scenes of sympathetic perception show one agent sympathizing with another agent's capacity for rational agency gains further support from the final *Middlemarch* scene depicting such perception, Dorothea's encounter with Lydgate. He stands under suspicion, for he is believed to have allowed a man, Raffles, to die at the behest of his benefactor Bulstrode. This suspicion, combined with frustration at his financial difficulties and his wife's egoism, has driven him nearly to despair. However, Dorothea believes that he has not acted badly, and offers to listen to his explanation of his difficulties. Such sympathy, it turns out, is in itself a relief to Lydgate. The narrator explains:

> Lydgate […] saw Dorothea's looking up at him with a sweet trustful gravity. The presence of a noble nature, generous in its wishes, ardent in its charity, changes the lights for us: we begin to see things again in their larger, quieter masses, and to believe that we too can be seen and judged in the wholeness of our character. That influence was beginning to act on Lydgate, who had

> for many days been seeing all life as one who is dragged and struggling amid the throng. He sat down again, and felt that he was recovering his old self in the consciousness that he was with one who believed in it. (819)

The revealing notion here for our purposes is that of seeing and judging individuals on the basis of the "wholeness of [their] character," insofar as it links sympathy to the perception of someone's essential personhood. It is significant, further, what Dorothea is specifically assessing; namely, she refuses to believe that Lydgate acted out of egoistic and selfish reasons. Her sympathetic perception sees clearly that, as the reader also knows, Lydgate has a clear conception of the good. His actions are driven by his selfless desire for medical knowledge, representing a foil to Casaubon in providing a figure whose scholarly pursuits are indeed worthwhile.[212] As the passage suggests, however, Lydgate's many frustrations have prevented him from acting in ways that serve his conception of the good, to the extent that he is beginning to lose sight of the way in which his actions are worthwhile and correspondingly experiencing a dissolution of identity: he has "been seeing all life as one who is dragged and struggling amid the throng." Dorothea's perception of him helps restore his sense of value: he can recover "his old self" because he is with one "who believed in it."

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Let me review. What I hope to have shown here is that Eliot's ethics of sympathy cannot be understood outside the context of her thinking about the importance of vocation: as her repeated notion that sympathy must "check" doctrines makes clear, she sees sympathy as essentially functioning to revise and guide an agent's moral principles, without replacing them entirely. Indeed, such principles, understood in their broader context as components of

[212] I am treading well-covered critical ground here. This is, for instance, W.J. Harvey's argument about Casaubon and Lydgate in "The Intellectual Background of the Novel: Casaubon and Lydgate," in *Middlemarch*: *Critical Approaches to the Novel*, ed. Barbara Hardy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

an agent's "practical identity," can be morally transformative: by creating projects for the person to work towards, they create the possibility of action on the basis of something other than mere biological desire. In checking such identities, which are susceptible to the corruption of egoistic desire (as agents come to desire the pursuit of certain ends instead of regarding them as valuable for their own sake), sympathy continually brings other perspectives into conversation with the agent's own, through instinctive responses to other people. In the same way that Kantian respect checks self-love, so Eliotic sympathy checks egoism. It does so through a combination of identification, in the form of pity or compassion, and discernment, which parses the identity of other agents as expressed in their actions, grasping whether they are acting selfishly or for the sake of ends they regard as intrinsically worthy.

One might object to the interpretation I've given here on a number of grounds: notably, I have said very little about the process of organic development within a community, which clearly plays a key role in Eliot's thinking about the origins and effects of sympathy, or about realist aesthetics, which Eliot overtly ties to sympathy at a number of moments. The most significant objection, however, involves a deeper question about interpretive methodology. Someone might be persuaded that there is significant evidence for my reading—the "checked doctrines" passages, the "great central ganglion" passage, Adam Bede's sympathizing with Arthur Donnithorne—but note that there are moments in the discussion presented here where my interpretation does not fit the text so cleanly.

Let me mention two: it would not surprise me if there are others. The first is from *Daniel Deronda:*

> His plenteous, flexible sympathy had ended by falling into one current with that reflective analysis which tends to neutralize sympathy (335)

And the second is from *Middlemarch*:

> But that simplicity of hers, holding up an ideal for others in her believing conception of them, was one of the great powers of her womanhood. (829)

Both of these passages, if not precisely evidence that contradicts my argument, do not obviously fit my understanding of Eliot's view. The first passage, as Audrey Jaffe points out, somewhat confusingly repeats the word "sympathy": Deronda's sympathy with others apparently negates the very sympathy he is deploying (*Scenes of Sympathy* 133). The second passage, far from emphasizing the "insight" in sympathy, compliments Dorothea precisely for her simplicity. Indeed, it seems to imply that lack of insight, insofar as such a lack supports a "believing conception" of other people that may not be strictly accurate, can be morally enabling.

It is not impossible to fit these passages with my argument. After all, if I am correct that sympathy involves the discernment of and identification with another's ends, then there is a sense in which one "sympathizes" with an end by making it one's own. Additional sympathy would negate this kind of sympathy, since the agent would constantly be questioning whether his identification with a given end was correct. Similarly, there is a sense in which simplicity is most enabling precisely when it represents the deliberate overcoming of discernment: Dorothea's simplicity appears at its most powerful not when she has no recognition of another's failures, as with Will Ladislaw, but when she deliberately overcomes such recognition to believe the best of another person, as she does with Rosamond.

A significant amount of interpretive effort, however, appears to be necessary to reconcile these passages with my overall argument, and the fact of that effort alone might seem to be evidence against my view. One is tempted to ask, "Well, if Eliot means what you say she means, why didn't she just say *that*, instead of what she did in fact say?" In other

words, even if the interpretation here grasps an important thread in Eliot's thinking about sympathy, surely it mistakes her texts in presenting her view with a clarity, coherence, and unity that she never actually demonstrates. Eliot's texts are often complexly reversing each other—indeed, wonderfully so—and my interpretation appears to dismiss this kind of complexity. At the very least, surely I misrepresent her view in introducing a set of terms—"practical identity," "conception of the good," and so forth—with which she could not have been familiar.

This objection is important, I think, because it does not dispute any particular element of my argument—though a dispute about such elements might be how the objection initially appears—but rather the broader interpretive strategy I have deployed. After all, one could almost certainly pose a similar objection against any interpretation that offered a unitary account of Eliot's view of sympathy in ethical life. Nevertheless, I think it is possible to address this worry: more specifically, it is possible to defend an interpretive methodology that emphasizes the search for coherence, and that seeks to make as much sense out of an author's view as possible. Developing this defense will be the subject of the next interlude.

Interlude: Justifying Anachronistic Frames

In this interlude, I want to consider the logic of a practice common to much of the literary criticism of the last generation and central to the interpretations offered in this dissertation: the use of anachronistic theoretical frames. I use each of these words with some care: I mean to denote the invocation of sophisticated positions in contemporary philosophy, psychology, linguistics, and other current discursive fields (thus "theoretical") as an interpretive context or background (thus "frame") for an understanding of literary authors whose historical positions mean that they could not have been familiar with the content of the specific position invoked (thus "anachronistic").[213] This practice is both common and controversial, and arguments about it have appeared in a number of different areas of the humanities. To introduce the issue more substantively, we can begin by considering the current debate about "presentism" in Shakespeare studies.

A number of recent critics of early modern English literature, including Hugh Grady, Terence Hawkes, Evelyn Gajowski, and Linda Charnes, have offered defenses of what they term "presentist" approaches.[214] Explicitly contrasted with "historicist" approaches, presentists insist on connecting the literary text in question to issues with which they are currently concerned, and emphasizing the way "the art-work continues to produce meanings

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[213] I use the word "frame" in particular as a variation on Manfred Jahn's terminology; he defines a frame as a "cognitive model that is selected and used (and sometimes discarded) in the process of reading a narrative text." "Frames, Preferences, and the Reading of Third-Person Narratives: Towards a Cognitive Narratology" *Poetics Today* 18.4 (Winter 1997): 441-468, 442.

[214] These figures are collected in a recent volume, P*resentist Shakespeares* (New York: Routledge, 2007). The earliest figures are Grady and Hawkes; Hugh Grady's *Shakespeare's Universal Wolf: Postmodernist Studies in Early Modern Reification* (New York: Oxford, 1996) and Hawkes's *Shakespeare in the Present* (New York: Routledge, 2002) self-consciously articulated 'presentism' as a new approach.

in historical eras different from that in which it was created."[215] Such critics have developed a number of different terms for the way such texts speak to current issues: Charnes refers to "wormholes," those moments in a text where "an idea" appears "in advance of its historical 'context'"; Hawkes speaks of "eruptions," whose appearance requires the application of later terminology, and Michael Bristol defends the "validity of the first person response," since, he argues, "historicity represents the depersonalization of response that I've been objecting to as a requirement of historicism."[216] Such terms accord reasonably well with recognizably presentist approaches in other subfields of literary criticism; for instance, Wai Chee Dimock's notion of "resonance," which involves a "kind of historicism" that is "diachronic" and that "allows texts to be seen as objects" that travel "across space and especially across time," relies on much the same metaphor as Charnes for approximately the same reasons.[217]

The arguments in favor of such approaches rely heavily on our inevitable situatedness in a given time and the impossibility of a critical stance outside of it. Hawkes and Grady summarize the point: "The truth is that none of us can step beyond time. The present can't be drained out of our experience. As a result, the critic's own 'situatedness' does not—cannot—*contaminate* the past. In effect, it constitutes the only means by which it's possible to see and perhaps comprehend it" (3). The point here is that it is mistaken to grade interpretations on the basis of their success at removing present concerns; such removal is impossible, and we should not think of it as a goal.

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[215] Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes, "Introduction." In *Presentist Shakespeares* (New York: Routledge, 2007): 4. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.
[216] Linda Charnes, "Anticipating Nostalgia: Finding Temporal Logic in a Textual Anomaly" *Textual Cultures* 4.1 (Spring 2009): 72-83, 76; Hawkes, *Shakespeare in the Present*, 20; Bristol, "Macbeth the Philosopher: Rethinking Context," *New Literary History* 42.4 (Autumn 2011): 641-662, 655.
[217] "A Theory of Resonance." *PMLA* 112.5 (October 1997): 1060-1071, 1061. Dimock redefines context "as a diachronic relation," where current theory that on a simple historicism would seem to "interfere" with genuine interpretation in fact "remakes a text while unmaking it," giving birth to "newly possible meaning" (1062).

What is interesting about this argument is the way such critics use it to counter certain assumptions about the possibility of valid interpretation. Hawkes and Grady go on to say: "Facts, after all, do not speak for themselves. Nor do texts. This doesn't mean that facts or texts don't exist. It does mean that all of them are capable of genuinely contradictory meanings, none of which has any independent, 'given', undeniable, or self-evident status" (3). Indeed, the notion of fidelity to the text stops seeming like a reasonable foundation for literary criticism, and starts to seem like a politically and ethically naïve ontology. As Gajowski puts the point, presentist approaches "are overt acts of shouldering responsibility for constructing meanings in Shakespeare's texts."[218] She explains:

> It is […] a matter of ethical responsibility, of owning up to meanings that we construct in Shakespeare's texts and culture rather than projecting the authority of those constructions—our authority—elsewhere on the author, the author's culture, the author's monarch […] Shakespeare scholars would likely agree, I think, that none of us can know with any degree of certitude what was in Shakespeare's mind. (686)

The logic of this argument is somewhat startling. From a pre-reflective standpoint, after all, the notion that there could be "ethical responsibility" in interpretation sounds odd: the point of interpretation is to understand something, and success or failure in that understanding is the only rubric by which one could hold an interpreter "responsible." The key phrase that explains Gajowski's point is "owning up to meanings that we construct." I take her suggestion to be that all Shakespeare critics engage in the same fundamental practice of imposing their own "constructed" meanings on his works, rather than actually discovering facts about them—after all, per Hawkes and Grady, "facts do not speak for themselves." What such critics ought to do is admit or "own up" to the fact that this imposition is what

[218] Gajowski, Evelyn. "Beyond Historicism: Presentism, Subjectivity, Politics" *Literature Compass* 7/8, 2010: 674-691, 680.

they are really doing, since "none of us can know" Shakespeare's mind.[219] Once they have done so, new criteria for assessing interpretations replace standard assumptions about textual faithfulness; namely, the political impact of a given interpretation becomes centrally relevant.[220]

It is in this way that presentist approaches become controversial. For instance, one of the critics Gajowski cites approvingly is Jonathan Dollimore, whose "cultural materialism" represents an important antecedent to contemporary presentism (683). One key element of Dollimore's groundbreaking text *Radical Tragedy* is not only his own anti-essentialist views about the self, but the impulse to find such views in early modern thinkers. For instance, Dollimore sees Francis Bacon as recognizing the culturally constructed nature of the self, in part because of a line from his essay "Of Custom and Education" that reads, "Nature, nor the engagement of words, are not so forcible as custom."[221] But as Tom McAlindon and Robin Headlam Wells have argued, this contention misses a great deal of the relevant context: "In the companion piece Bacon characteristically put the other side of the argument, asserting the inviolability of that essential self which exists at a deeper level and is not affected by the vagaries of social behavior: 'nature is often hidden, sometimes overcome, seldom extinguished."[222] The point here is not that Dollimore misreads the line, exactly, but rather that he fails to place the line in proper context with the rest of a writer's work. Thus,

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[219] See also Hawkes's call for "a kind of principle and self-inventing betrayal" of scholarly tradition in hopes of "an expansion of the possibilities of our *use* of criticism as a material intervention into history, rather than the prosecuation of what we misguidedly think of as scholarly 'facts' or 'truth'" (20).

[220] This is perhaps an overly charitable reconstruction of the presentist views presented thus far. John Holbo, motivated by worries similar to mine, writes: "'presentism' means *relatively more* historicist injustice than historicism, *or it means nothing*," and goes on to accuse Hawkes and Grady et al of failing to think through their position clearly. "Shakespeare Now: The Function of Presentism at the Critical Time." *Literature Compass* 5/6 (2008): 1097-1110, 1098.

[221] *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology, and Power in the Drame of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Duke: Duke University Press, 2003): 11. Dollimore quotes from Bacon additionally: "men behave as if they were dead images and engines moved only by the wheels of custom."

[222] Wells, Robin Headlam. "Historicism and Presentism in Early Modern Studies." *The Cambridge Quarterly* 29.1, 2000: 37-60, 49.

the anachronistic framing is caused by and causative of a dismissal of the rest of the textual evidence. Importantly, either a historicist or a formalist could voice this objection: both approaches could object to Dollimore because of his dismissal of essential evidence.

My point is not that Dollimore is wrong about Bacon while McAlindon and Wells are right; this is a claim I am not qualified to assess, to say the least. My point is rather that there is a real worry here about presentist approaches and their use of anachronistic theoretical frames. Even if Wells is wrong about Dollimore, the objection she makes is an essential one for the presentist to address. Wells's point drives home the fact that, instead of reflecting an honest "shouldering" of the constructed nature of literary interpretation, the presentist can be guilty of a theoretical bias. Indeed, the deep interdisciplinarity of the frames invoked exacerbates the worry. In their urge to find sophisticated theorizing in texts from the past, such anachronistic frames, drawn from theoretical fields far from a writer's intellectual atmosphere, reshape a given literary text in a way that violates the evidence it offers: such readings thus persuade only by ignoring or dismissing key pieces of textual evidence.

Recognizing this problem leads to an additional worry, about an implicit canonicity. If presentist approaches are warping the texts they address to fit contemporary issues, it is worth wondering how such critics select the texts they choose to interpret. Surely it is not an accident that Shakespeare, rather than a number of other early modern writers, has received the attention of so many presentist critics. One cannot help but think that an undefended aesthetic commitment, holding that Shakespeare's works are more worthy of attention than others, underlies the urge to find engagements with our current issues in his work.

In the hands of a different critic than myself, these worries might lead to an insistence on a stringent historicism—indeed, for other critics, it has done so.[223] But there remains the original point that the naïve standpoint about interpretation is, after all, naïve—the stance outside of history where one can assess a text purely on the basis of its "evidence" is, importantly, impossible. What is needed is a middle way: an account that acknowledges how our current interests guide our interpretations of texts from earlier periods, but recognizes also that such interpretations are not purely "constructed"—that the texts and the periods in which they first occurred exert certain constraints on the kinds of theoretical frames that can be relevant. Certainly, such an approach is essential for the content formalism I defended in the introduction: if I am going to claim that texts are valuable for the ideas they express, I need an account of what ideas are, and how to understand them in our terms. One might argue furthermore that I am guilty of precisely the same willful interdisciplinarity Wells finds in Dollimore: certainly, my claim that George Eliot's moral philosophy is best understood in the light of David Velleman's interpretation of Kant is not a description Eliot could have accepted of her own work.

I am going to argue here that I am not guilty of a willful interdisciplinarity.[224] I will try to do so by developing an account of the kinds of constraints texts and their historical contexts place on anachronistic frames and suggesting that my interpretations accord with them. The issues involved here, depending as they do on the nature of interpretation and

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[223] This is essentially the approach recommended by David Kastan in *Shakespeare After Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

[224] In so doing, I also hope to lend a little clarity to the ongoing debate about "interdisciplinarity" more generally. The term "Interdisciplinary" and its cognates have tended to be over-used and under-theorized; see Stanley Fish, "Being Interdisciplinary Is So Very Hard to Do," *Profession* 89 (1989): 15-22 for a criticism along these lines. However, a growing literature has attempted to organize interdisciplinary approaches and reflect on the nature of interdisciplinarity as such: see Joe Moran, *Interdisciplinarity* (New York: Routledge, 2002), and especially Julie Klein, *Interdisciplinarity: History, Theory and Practice* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991). The critical stance defended in this interlude and practiced in this dissertation is perhaps better described as a kind of multidisciplinarity: the methodology I defend tries to explain how ideas central to other disciplines might be relevant for literary criticism, but it does so without questioning the disciplinary authority on those ideas.

history itself, have of course been at the center of some of the most important philosophical debates of the twentieth century, and my account will proceed through a return to some of these conversations.[225] I want to begin with the argument that is perhaps most directly relevant—Shoshana Felman's discussion of the anachronistic use of psychoanalytic concepts in literary criticism.

* * *

In "To Open the Question," Shoshana Felman famously noted that the "relationship between literature and psychoanalysis" usually ends up being one of "subordination, a relation in which literature is submitted to the authority, to the prestige of psychoanalysis. While literature is considered as a body of *language*—to be *interpreted*—psychoanalysis is considered as a body of *knowledge*, whose competence is called upon to interpret."[226] Felman diagnoses this as a relationship of power, akin to Hegel's master-slave dialectic: the critic posits the discourse of psychoanalysis as the master, while literature fights for recognition through demonstrating its attainment of psychoanalytic truths (5). Unsurprisingly, when seen this way, the relationship between the two fields "leaves dissatisfied the literary critic" (6).

Felman diagnoses the problem here as one of "application": the naïve psychoanalytic critic simply applies his theoretical frame to the text, and thus inevitably overlooks its complexity. As an alternative, Felman suggests that psychoanalytic critics practice "implication," which she describes thus:

> The notion of application would be replaced by the radically different notion of implication: bringing analytical questions to bear upon literary questions,

[225] As the debate about presentism perhaps suggests, these are also currently pressing questions in current debates about critical methodology, where it seems to me the role of literary context is a vexed issue. This is exemplified by a recent special issue of *New Literary History* addressed to "context," and perhaps especially by Rita Felski's contribution, "Context Stinks!" *New Literary History* 42.4 (Autumn 2011): 573-591.
[226] "To Open the Question," *Yale French Studies* 55/56 (1977): 5-10, 5. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

> involving psychoanalysis in the scene of literary analysis, the interpreter's role would here be not to *apply* to the text an acquired science […] but to act as a go-between, to generate implications between literature and psychoanalysis […] each one finding itself enlightened, informed, but also affected, displaced by the other (8-9).

Rather than positing one discourse as "an acquired science," the goal here is rather to posit the discourses as equally valid approaches to a related set of problems. Each has its own standard for generating claims and establishing their validity, but since they pursue importantly related goals, the claims of one discourse might "affect" or "displace" those of the other. Thus, rather than granting the status of "knowledge" only to psychoanalysis, Felman suggests that literary texts merit equal recognition. Rather than treating literature simply as a site where one might find the evidence of psychoanalytical truths, Felman suggests a criticism that sees literature as a kind of thinking, one that might usefully revise certain tenets of psychoanalytic thought.

Felman's approach offers two important precepts for anachronistic framing, in addition to the useful terms "implication" and "application." In particular, Felman's suggestion that application becomes objectionable when the psychoanalytic critic fails to recognize the literary text as capable of independent thought is crucial: her view of the critic as someone who recognizes the theoretical implications of a text rather than as someone who insists on finding views she already believes to be true is well-taken. Though Felman does not put it quite this way, what implicative reading seems to require is a recognition of and willingness to engage with the thinking a literary text overtly presents, rather than dismissing it in order to fit it to the application of a psychoanalytic frame. A second point is implicit in but central to Felman's "implication/application" metaphor. This distinction

depends on something like a corresponding "inside/outside" logic, and thus suggests that applicative criticism is in part problematic because it derives its claims from material external to the text. Felman's additional metaphors reinforce this way of conceiving interpretation: implicative criticism acts as a "go-between," moving from within the literary text to the psychoanalytic discourse.

Now, this account is not fully adequate, for a few reasons. First, it seems to me more confusing than enlightening to think of aesthetic texts as existing in a "domain" which involves the analysis of "literary questions." Felman later goes on to suggest that "since psychoanalysis itself is equally a body of language, and literature also a body of knowledge" what her view entails is that "the literary critic" should create a dialogue "between two different bodies of language and between two different modes of knowledge" (6). As I argued in the preface and in the introduction, the insistence on seeing literature as possessing its own form of knowledge oftentimes precludes consideration of the ideas literary texts engage that are the central elements of other discourses. I won't repeat the argument in detail, but it seems to me more fruitful to think of the problem as an assessment of when a critic might plausibly see literary texts as developing ideas recognizable as psychoanalytic claims, rather than as a question of how two separates "modes of knowledge"—literature and psychoanalysis—might usefully engage each other. Similarly, it is not clear to me how helpful Felman's psychoanalytic diagnosis of the relationship between psychoanalysis and literature is. On the simple model of application, Felman explains, "literature's function […] is to *serve* precisely the *desire* of psychoanalytical theory—its desire for recognition; exercising its authority and *power* over the literary field" (6). This way of putting it suggests that the problem is disrespect for the interpretive object, which, while perhaps true, does not point very clearly to any more specific interpretive practice. Finally, of course, Felman's essay is

short, and the subsequent conversation about it has not attempted to clarify and develop this key distinction.[227]

Nevertheless, her argument captures the central point I am offering in defense of my own anachronistic readings: rather than applying theoretical frames essentially external to the novels I consider, I want to suggest that I am simply clarifying ideas the texts already imply. To develop this notion further, I will turn now to a debate that is much more extensive: the arguments surrounding the "contextualist" approach in the history of ideas.

* * *

The publication in 1969 of Quentin Skinner's famous essay "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas" represented the cresting of a new wave in the historiography of political theory.[228] As J.G.A Pocock, who along with Skinner and John Dunn was one of the key practitioners of the new methodology, described the shift in 1971, "during the last ten years scholars interested in the study of systems of political thought have had the experience of living through radical times, which may amount to a transformation in their discipline."[229] The transformation Pocock had in mind involved the overt rejection of the methodology for the history of ideas first articulated by Arthur Lovejoy, who emphasized the analysis of the broad "unit-ideas" that lay un-articulated underneath the

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[227] Typical of this response is Peter Brooks's "The Idea of a Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism," *Critical Inquiry* 13.2 (Winter 1987): 334-348. Brooks opens by claiming, "psychoanalytic literary criticism has always been something of an embarrassment," and cites Felman as pointing out "more effectively than any other critic" the problem with pairing psychoanalysis "and" literature (335). He does not, however, take up and expand her distinction.

[228] "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas." *History and Theory* 8.1 (1969): 3-53. Further citations to this essay are marked as "Meaning" and included parenthetically in the text. The following discussion will cite a number of thinkers who claim foundational importance for Skinner's essay, but for a retrospective discussion sympathetic with Skinner's concerns, see J.G.A. Pocock, "The State of the Art," *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985): 1-34, 4-5. Further citations to this volume titled "Art" and included parenthetically in the text.

[229] "Languages and their Implications: The Transformation of the Study of Political Thought." *Politics, Language, Time* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971): 3-41, 3. Further citations to this essay are marked "Languages" and included parenthetically in the text.

intellectual debates of a given period, and subsequently the way they developed.[230] In the history of political thought, this approach in practice meant the isolation of a canon of texts of political theory, running from Plato to Marx, which critics would then compare and discuss (Languages 4-5). Against this canonization, Skinner, Pocock, and their allies insisted on the fundamental historicity of an idea: as Skinner argued, "the notion that any fixed 'idea' has persisted is spurious" (Meaning 35). Instead, historians must understand an idea in terms of its original illocutionary force (Meaning 39), in Skinner's phrase, and restore it to the particular political language of its period, in Pocock's terms (Languages 18-19). In emphasizing the discursive nature of knowledge and the impossibility of comparing intellectual formations between periods, Skinner and Pocock shared both explicitly and implicitly in the broad critiques of the philosophy of science offered by Michel Foucault and Thomas Kuhn.[231] Skinner's "Meaning and Understanding" summarized in an impressive amount of scholarly detail both the critique of the Lovejoy model such "contextualists" articulated and the methodology they offered in its place, and the debate surrounding Skinner's essay offers a rich theoretical archive for the defense of theoretical anachronism.

Skinner is, first, suspicious of interpretations based on an attempt to grasp a text's stance on some issue or issue that the interpreter sees as timeless, which he calls the "mythology of doctrines" (Meaning 7). In his diagnosis, "the essential belief that each of the

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[230] *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936): 1, 20. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

[231] Skinner does not draw at all on Foucault, or indeed very much on the continental tradition in philosophy; his nevertheless rich theoretical archive is drawn from the analytic philosophers of the Oxford school, and in particular speech-act theory. However, the theoretical affinity between the two has been drawn out by others, particularly James Tully, in 'The Pen is a Mighty Sword: Quentin Skinner's Analysis of Politics." *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics*. Ed. James Tully (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988): 7-25. Tully writes: "Skinner's work thus seems to me to put forward a hypothesis for further study and research similar to one advanced by Foucault […] the history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning" (24). Pocock is quite open about his debt to Kuhn, writing that Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* is "perhaps the most valuable single contribution" to the establishment of "the methodological autonomy of the history of ideas" (Languages 13). This should not be taken to deny the real differences between these figures, to which I will return, but the broad affinity is nevertheless striking.

classic writers may be expected to consider and explicate some determinate set of 'fundamental concepts' of 'perennial interest' […] seems to be the basic source of the confusions engendered by this approach" (Meaning 5). As he goes on to explain, the notion—for instance—that a historian might see Plato, Locke, and Hegel as all addressing the same question about the nature of the "state" is methodologically pernicious: it leads to a series of misleading anachronisms, as theorists are faulted for not properly addressing issues of later concern (13) or praised for "anticipating" them (11). Both approaches, Skinner argues, beg an essential question: "whether any of these writers ever intended, or even could have intended to do, what they are thus castigated for not having done," or praised for doing (16). Moreover, this interpretive impulse can lead to more damaging anachronisms, as the failure to properly situate a given text within its context can lead the philosophical critic to mistakenly assume the presence of a later view and thus overlook real complexity; thus he explains, "the historian may conceptualize an argument in such a way that its alien elements are dissolved into an apparent but misleading familiarity" (27). As his example of the tempting but mistaken impulse to see John Locke's notion of the right to revolt as connected to his remarks on "government by consent" demonstrates, our later ways of addressing an issue can infect our historical account and blind us to a writer's actual view.[232]

Additionally, such an approach tends to produce a "mythology of coherence" in the figures it considers: when guided by an attention to "perennial problems," as he contends, "it will become dangerously easy for the historian to conceive it as his task to supply or find in each of these [classic] texts the coherence which they may appear to lack" ("Meaning" 16).

[232] Skinner explains: "There is decisive evidence, however, that when Locke spoke of government by consent this simply did not happen to be what he had in mind at all. It is now clear that Locke's concern with the concept of consent arises solely in connection with the origin of legitimate societies. This is hardly what we should regard as an argument for consent, but it happens to be Locke's argument, and the only result of failing to start from this point is to misdescribe the whole theory, and so to accuse Locke of having bungled an account which he was not, in fact, trying to write" (Meaning 28).

What will happen here is that whatever issue a current interpreter might be interested in will guide his interpretation in such a way as to turn whatever scattered remarks a historical figure makes about it into a key for addressing the *oeuvre*, so that a reconstructed and newly coherent thinker will appear to be discussing the problem in a way his actual texts never individually did. Skinner is characteristically scathing: "The history thus written becomes a history not of ideas at all, but of abstractions: a history of thoughts which no one ever actually succeeded in thinking, at a level of coherence which no one ever actually attained" (18). Such an impulse has additional problems as an interpretive heuristic, since it inevitably dismisses what a writer actually says about his purpose, and, in its insistence on coherence, it leaves the possibility that writers simply contradict themselves unexplored (19; 20).

Against this approach, Skinner recommended a renewed interpretive focus on a writer's intentions.[233] Drawing on J.L. Austin's theory of speech acts, he argued that linguistic behavior involved understanding more than just what a speaker's words meant; one had to grasp what the speaker meant to do with them. Such an approach is essential to grasping, for instance, irony; in Skinner's example, the words in Daniel Defoe's tract on dissenting might literally recommend the beheading of noncomformists, but what he was doing with that meaning was recommending religious toleration (32). He explains the point further in an overt rejection of Wimsatt and Beardsley's analysis of the "intentional fallacy," arguing that the comprehension of an utterance "will be equivalent to an understanding of

[233] One ought to emphasize that it is on this point where the faultlines between Skinner, Pocock, and Foucault emerge. Foucault of course would find this view hopelessly naïve; as his essay "What is an Author?" makes clear, he insists on reducing the notion of the "author" to a principle in discursive formation, rather than seeing an author as a subjectivity exterior to the texts that gives them their meaning. *The Essential Foucault* (New York: The New Press, 2003). Pocock similarly is suspicious of authorial intention: a subsequent interpreter has dubbed him a "hard linguistic contextualist" precisely because he implies that the "language" or paradigm of a text is determinative of its meaning; see Mark Bevir, "Errors of Linguistic Contextualism, *History and Theory* 31.3 (October 1992): 276-298, 277. Skinner is in these terms a "soft linguistic contextualist," because he does not see historical context as having such causal power. Though I will not try to argue for it here, I think Skinner and the analytic philosophers he draws on are basically right about the nature of language—that it is an inescapably intentional act, and that comprehension requires grasping that intention. This basic agreement is the reason I develop my own version of presentism as an engagement with Skinner.

that agent's primary intentions in issuing that particular utterance."[234] In order to grasp such intentions, a careful focus on a writer's context is essential—not because it is "the determinant of what is said," but because it is "an ultimate framework for helping to decide what conventionally recognizable meanings in a society of *that* kind, it might in principle have been possible for someone to have intended to communicate" (Meaning 49).[235]

Both a positive and a negative methodological principle follow from this emphasis. Positively, Skinner insists on capturing the "mental world" of the writer (Motives 78): "No agent can eventually be said to have meant or done something which he could never be brought to accept as a correct description of what he had meant or done" (Meaning 29). Such descriptions can thus never be anachronistic: "It follows that any plausible account of what the agent meant must necessarily fall under […] the range of descriptions which the agent himself could at least in principle have applied" (Meaning 29). This criterion, famous enough that Richard Rorty calls it "Skinner's maxim," places as central to the interpretive task writers' own sense of their purposes and goals. Negatively, Skinner insists on the repudiation of presentist impulses. In the essay's most famous passage, he writes:

> This reformulation and insistence on the claim that there are no perennial problems in philosophy […] is not even a denial of the possibility that there may be apparently perennial *questions*, if these are sufficiently abstractly framed. All I wish to insist is that whenever it is claimed that the point of the

[234] "Motives, Intentions, and the Interpretation of Texts." *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics.* Ed. James Tully (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988): 68-78, 74. Further citations to this essay are marked "Motives" and included parenthetically in the text. There is an affinity here between Skinner's approach and the critique of anti-intentionalist literary theory in the famously controversial essay by Walter Benn Michaels and Steven Knapp, "Against Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 8.4 (Summer 1982): 723-742, 728. Michaels in particular reiterates a developed version of his view of writing as fundamentally intentional in his *The Shape of the Signifier* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2006); thus he explains, "The mistake of the New Critics […] is to treat what is in fact an intentional object as if it were a natural object" (106).

[235] It is perhaps worth mentioning that Skinner accepts a reformulated version of the intentional fallacy. He suggests that "motives" can "be said to stand 'outside' [an author's] works in such a way that their recovery will be irrelevant" in part because it will not do "for a writer to assure a critic that he intended to write a masterpiece" (Motives 73).

> historical study of such questions is that we may learn directly from the answers, it will be found that what *counts* as an answer will usually look, in a different culture or period, so different in itself that it can hardly be in the least useful even to go on thinking of the relevant question as being "the same" in the required sense after all. *More crudely: we must learn to do our thinking for ourselves.* (Meaning 52, emphasis mine)

There is an interesting concession here in the notion that "perennial questions" are possible when "sufficiently abstractly framed"; I shall return to this in a moment. Nevertheless, the opposition to presentism here should be clear: central to Skinner's historical methodology is the refusal to think that we might learn from historical texts how to solve our own philosophical problems. Because earlier generations, if they share our political problems at all, will have conceived of them in such different ways and as admitting of such different possible solutions, we contemporary theorists need to simply "think for ourselves."

One can direct Skinner's objections with almost no translation against presentist literary criticism. Certainly, the interpretation of George Eliot I offered in the last chapter is vulnerable to them: there is no question that I have considered her moral philosophy as worthy of attention in part because it anticipates a certain way of thinking about Kantian ethics. Moreover, in collecting her remarks about how sympathy might "check" intentions and doctrines from across her fiction, there can be no doubt I have posited a mythological coherence. Even if I am right about some central themes in Eliot's thinking about ethics—certainly, I hope that I am—my interpretation undeniably lends that thinking a systematic nature and scholarly provenance that the reading of any individual text would not support. Fortunately, Skinner's work produced an immediate, wide-ranging, and provocative

response, now sustained through a generation of historiographers, and it is possible to mine that response for a defense of anachronism.

First, a number of critics have pointed out Skinner's concession that some "questions" might be perennial, even if their answers are not, and moreover argued that Skinner seems to overlook the obvious point that historical figures often overtly engage each other. As Mark Bevir contends, "Political theorists often discuss classic works, and when they do so they thereby create chains in which their concerns link up with those of the authors of these works."[236] So in some ways anachronism will appear not merely permissible, but obviously so: we can meaningfully ask some contemporary Marxist how she thinks about the nature of capital, and whether Marx might agree. More generally, whether a question in political theory is "perennial" seems upon reflection to be an empirical question, one much different from whether there are "eternal" questions. Robert Lamb puts the point thus: "Skepticism about perennial issues is skepticism about the longevity of philosophical problems," and the notion that some problems "simply cannot last a long time seems not only not self-evident […] but also severely counterintuitive."[237] The longstanding issues in philosophical theology usefully exemplify this issue: while contemporary religious discourse has little in common with early Christianity, it seems nevertheless possible for modern Christians to draw from Augustine's explanation of why God permits suffering. Again, anachronism seems justified: because contemporary religious believers share a problem with Augustine, they can meaningfully consider his answer to the problem.

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[236] Mark Bevir, "Are there Perennial Problems in Political Theory?" *Political Studies* 1994 XLII, 662-675, 668. Further citations to this essay marked as "Perennial" and included parenthetically in the text.
[237] Robert Lamb, "Quentin Skinner's Revised Historical Contextualism: A Critique." *History of the Human Sciences*, 22.3 (209): 51-73, 68. Skinner gave ground on this point in later remarks; referring to this passage, he writes: "My way of putting the point appeared to deny the obvious fact that western traditions of philosophy have contained long continuities." "A reply to my critics." in *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics*. Ed. James Tully. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988. 231-288, 283. Further citations to this essay are marked "Reply" and included parenthetically in the text.

Moreover, even in situations where thinkers from the past are not straightforwardly addressing our current issues, it is not obvious that the point of historical scholarship should be to understand them in their own terms. David Hull makes this point in his "In Defense of Presentism" by drawing on the following wonderful passage from Lewis Carroll:

> "What do you consider the largest map that would be really useful?"
>
> "About six inches to the mile."
>
> "Only six inches!" exclaimed Mein Herr. "We very soon got to six yards to the mile. Then we tried a hundred yards to the mile. And then came the grandest idea of all! We actually made a map of the country, on the scale of a mile to the mile!"
>
> "Have you used it much?" I enquired.
>
> "It has never been spread out, yet," said Mein Herr: "the farmers objected: they said it would cover the whole country, and shut out the sunlight! So we now use the country itself, as its own map, and I assure you it does nearly as well."[238]

The point here, of course, is that it is not an objection to maps to say that they are abstractions and simplifications of the territory they represent. They are supposed to be all of those things, because that is how we use them. Similarly, it might not be such a pressing problem that an interpretation of a writer from a previous generation translates that writer's concerns into abstract issues relevant for a present reader: in offering a contemporary guide, it serves its precise purpose. Denying this goal culminates ultimately in the abandonment of interpretation, under the theory that all texts are interpretations of themselves.

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[238] David L. Hull, "In Defense of Presentism." *History and Theory*, 18.1 (February 1979): 1-15.

The editors of another response to Skinner make a similar point: "To say that [presentist] histories are anachronistic is true but pointless: they are *supposed* to be anachronistic."[239] They compare such historians to anthropologists, and suggest that anthropological work that merely describes the rituals of a given tribe in the tribe's own terms has not done its job—"what we want to be told is whether that tribe has anything interesting to tell *us*" (6). If someone were to refuse this task because "such filtering and paraphrase" would "distort and betray" the tribe's culture, then there is a sense in which he "would no longer be an anthropologist, but a sort of cultist" (7). The same holds true for an intellectual historian: to give up the goal of explaining a historical figure's insights in terms contemporary readers can understand and appreciate as important to some issue is to cease to work "for us."

Richard Rorty, one of the editors, added to this argument a distinction between "historical" and "rational" reconstructions of a writer's view. Historical reconstructions will follow "Skinner's maxim," and will constrain themselves to offering only descriptions which the writer in question could in principle endorse. Rational reconstructions, on the other hand, will offer as charitable an account of the writer as possible, given our current best beliefs about the truth of the matter:

> By filtering out certain sentences as irrelevant to his concerns, and to the concerns the author himself would have had if he had known more about the

[239] Richard Rorty et al, "Introduction." In *Philosophy in History: Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy*. Ed. Richard Rorty, J.B. Schneewind, and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). Further citations included parenthetically in the text. This introduction is an interesting text: it is notable that Skinner was one of its authors, despite the fact that it presents a clear disagreement with his view. Given that Skinner reiterated his original views in a new version of his foundational essay in 1988, it seems unlikely to me that he in fact agreed with this introduction; this is perhaps gestured at in a somewhat pregnant line from the preface, "the editors do not think with one mind or speak with one voice" (ix). For reasons of alphabetical preference, I shall refer to the author of this essay as "Rorty"—as will become clear, I also see a coherence between this essay and his individual contribution to the volume of essays—but one should keep in mind that the authorial situation is rather more complicated than that.

> way the world is, while giving a sympathetic rendering of the remainder, the historian of philosophy helps the dead philosopher put his act together for a new audience. (6)

This sort of interpretation is the "mapping" of intellectual history. In the same way that the cartographer might dismiss features of the landscape she thinks users are not interested in and emphasize elements she thinks they are, so rational reconstructors will "filter," dismissing certain elements of the text as not essential, emphasizing others as compelling, and organizing the whole into a package for a new group of readers. In so doing, such interpreters will overtly look for moments where a writer anticipates a later development; they will let their own improved knowledge of "the way the world is" guide them, and use that knowledge to restate the writer's views in ways that render them more plausible.

Importantly, Rorty resists the impulse to say that either "rational reconstruction" or "historical reconstruction" captures what a given text really "means":

> It is natural to describe Columbus as having discovered America rather than Cathay, and not knowing that he had done so. It is almost equally natural to describe Aristotle as unwittingly describing the effects of gravity rather than of natural downward motion. It is slightly more strained, but just a further step along the same line, to describe Plato as having unconsciously believed that all words were names […] It is fairly clear that in [the historical] sense of 'mean' Plato meant nothing like this. When we anachronistically say he 'really' held such doctrines we meant that, in an imagined argument with present-day philosophers about whether he should have had certain other views, he would have been driven back on a premise which he never formulated, dealing with a topic he never considered—a premise which may have to be suggested to him by a friendly rational reconstructor. (53).

While Rorty claims critics ought to be careful about admitting which project they are engaged in—that is, whether the reconstruction is historical or rational—there is no reason to give either side a monopoly on the word "meaning." As he puts it later, "grasping the meaning of an assertion is a matter of placing that assertion in a context," and "whether we privilege the context which consists of what the assertor was thinking about around the time he or she made the assertion depends upon what we want to get out of thinking about the assertion" (55). The rational reconstructor will be happy to concede that she is using terms the historical figure could not have, because the interpretive goal is different.

Rorty's examples are worthy of some attention, because they suggest how the appeal to the truth works as an interpretive matter: we say that Columbus discovered America without knowing it because we believe that the landmass Columbus approached is *in fact* America. Similarly, many of the objects Plato thought of metaphysical entities we now see as linguistic and conceptual, and the translation Rorty has in mind involves turning Plato's claims about "forms" into claims about language. In this way, the critic sees Plato as approaching a certain problem, one that she now better understands. This self-conscious rational reconstruction, I think, represents a version of presentism that survives Skinner's worries. Of course, rational reconstruction will usually start as historicist, and will necessarily contain a good deal of purely historical reconstruction—as Rorty notes in the introduction, "one cannot figure out whether Spinoza got anything right before figuring out what he was talking about" (10). One might see this as a redefined version of Felman's implication/application distinction: one way to assess whether a text genuinely implies a concept is to reconstitute the text in the writer's own terms, and use this as a constraint.

What allows rational reconstruction to survive Skinner's critique is its ability to pass an expanded version of his claim that an interpretation is only viable if a figure could be

brought to accept it. The rational reconstructor works primarily by imagining not the particular historical writer, but that writer ideally re-educated. The goal here is still to capture what the writer intended to say, but we imagine that writer as more fully informed than she could ever have been. Rorty explains: "We are interested not only in what the Aristotle who walked the streets of Athens 'could be brought to accept as a correct description,'" but "in what an ideally reasonable and educable Aristotle" could accept (51). And this is what I would want to say about my interpretation of George Eliot: my hope would be that an ideally educated Eliot, deeply read in the tradition of Kantian ethics and contemporary moral philosophy, would recognize her own view in my account.

We can thus re-define the worry about presentism as a worry about the kinds of constraints historical reconstructions exert on rational reconstructions. Strict criteria in this realm are probably impossible; as Kenneth Minogue argued in his response to Skinner, it is not clear that interpretations in the history of ideas are susceptible to clear methodological rules.[240] To borrow from Mark Bevir, there is no such a thing as an interpretive "method," in the form of a clear procedure guaranteed to yield true results, but one can perhaps nevertheless speak of heuristics—general hermeneutic principles that tend to produce persuasive analyses.[241] In my reading of Eliot and in the subsequent chapters, I have followed two such principles, which I want to articulate here. The first is a close attention to the repetition of ideas across a text and across a writer's work. Each of the chapters ranges

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[240] Minogue writes: "We need not doubt that the philosophy of speech acts, like hermeneutics, belongs to the wider cultural field of which intellectual history is a part; and that the latter will benefit from contact with psychology, or anthropology, and much else. It all depends on the contingent matter of putting acute and interesting questions into the heads of intellectual historians. Hence there is room to doubt whether they ought to sympathize with Skinner in feeling 'an increasing need to look for renewed philosophical help.'" "Method in Intellectual History," *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics*. Ed. James Tully (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988): 176-193, 183.

[241] *The Logic of the History of Ideas* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Bevir writes: "All methods differ from heuristic techniques in that they are either sufficient or necessary to ensure a correct conclusion about something, whereas heuristic techniques merely provide a potentially fruitful way of reaching a correct conclusion about something" (10).

widely across an *oeuvre*: the goal is to ensure that when I take an idea to be worthy of a presentist analysis, I am not guilty of the sort of presentism Robin Headlam Wells found in Jonathan Dollimore, where a selective attention to the evidence appeared to give rise to the anachronistic frame. There is an inevitable cost, insofar as I am thus invariably guilty of the mythology of coherence, but this is just to admit that my reconstructions are rational ones, and not strictly historical.

The second heuristic I have followed is a close attention to the overt ideas expressed in a text, in the form of passages where a narrator or a character openly discusses a philosophical claim. In the introduction I suggested that such passages mattered importantly in the question of whether a literary text was asserting a given idea; properly understood, this point also matters for the question of the justification of presentism, for such passages offer the best evidence for establishing the historical reconstruction of how an author thought about a given issue. And they matter for a further reason. One might object to the arguments I have given so far by denying that rational reconstructions are a genre worthy of much attention. Yes, perhaps Lewis Carroll was right, and any interpretation must be somewhat abstracted and presentist, but the goal ought to be to minimize this factor as far as possible—the map ought to be as close to the land as it can be. Our impulse to reconstruct rationally reflects our own bias, and as such ought to be marginalized as much as is compatible with the need to address the *explanadum* in terms comprehensible to a contemporary reader. I want now to argue that this is not the case. In fact, writers and their texts call for rational reconstructions, and we do them an interpretive disservice if we think we can ignore this call. Central to this argument are a text's overt theoretical statements.

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One of the most recurring objections to Skinner's contextualism disputed his assertion that he could dismiss as interpretively irrelevant the question of which ideas were true or false. As Charles Taylor puts the point, for Skinner texts in political theory "are attempts to manipulate the terms of debate in which the political identity of a society is established and continued. But they can be identified as such as independent of any judgment of their truth or validity."[242] However, Taylor goes on to argue, the historian's use of his own "explanatory language" cannot help but imply the belief that such language is "more accurate, more precise—more truthful," and thus the "bracketing of the issue of truth is never successfully achieved" (220). Additionally, a number of Skinner's critics pointed out that regardless of what he thought about the foolishness of timeless problems in political philosophy, authors from earlier periods certainly thought the issues they were addressing were timeless, and thus interpreters misunderstand them in insisting on understanding them only in the terms of their discourse. John Patrick Diggins contends: "Authors use texts to convert ideas into truths that are not intended to have a context."[243] In other words, Skinner's attempt to make authorial intent the central feature of analysis ironically leads to the restoration of philosophical truth as an interpretive criterion: "We may discover past thinkers who felt their thoughts would have little value if there were determined by historical circumstances. Thus in some instances the intellectual historian could hardly be a contextualist if he or she seriously wanted to understand the thought of a political thinker exactly as the thinker understood it" (161).

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[242] "The Hermeneutics of Conflict," in *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics*. Ed. James Tully. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988. 218-228, 219. Further citations included parenthetically in the text. Taylor develop a similar argument against Michel Foucault in his essay "Foucault on Freedom and Truth." *Political Theory*, 12.2 (May 1984): 152-183.

[243] John Patrick Diggins, "The Oyster and the Pearl: The Problem of Contextualism in Intellectual History." *History and Theory* 23.2 (May 1984): 151-169, 155. Robert Lamb makes a similar point: "if a thinker seems to have been pitching his or her arguments at an abstract, philosophical level, there would be no reason to privilege a contextualist understanding of that argument" (58).

There was always a limited sense in which Skinner was prepared to acknowledge this point. In particular, he suggests that his goal is to make the subjects of his interpretation appear as "rational as possible," and some fundamentally timeless assumptions are necessary for any such interpretive endeavor—for instance, that the writer of the text in question meant his utterances to contain true propositions. Thus he remarks: "Some of [the texts under study] may be pervasively marked by hidden codes such as irony. But we have no option but to assume that, in general, that they can be treated as straightforward expressions of belief. Unless we can assume such a convention of truthfulness, we cannot hope to make any headway with the project of explaining what they believed" (Reply 246). And more, the critic must assume that the writers have certain attitudes towards belief formation; for example, the interpreter must posit a desire to be consistent, since "to espouse a given belief as well as its contradictory is to hold at least one belief that must be false" (Reply 239). Similarly, positing rationality requires that one see the objects of interpretation as "concerned with the kinds of coherence, and where appropriate the kinds of evidence, that give them grounds for concluding that their affirmations of belief can in fact be justified" (Reply 240). The point here is that these three interpretive assumptions—that writers take to be true the things they say, that they will be consistent when possible, and will be concerned with the grounds for their beliefs, whether evidentiary or logical—are not avoidable, and to this extent a concern for truth is an essential part of interpretation.

One must, I want to argue, take these presentist impulses a step further, and the step is suggested by the objection to Skinner that writers often intend to address issues of timeless import. In "Transhistorical Intentions and the Persistence of Allegory," E.D. Hirsch argues that literary texts often contain "allegorical intentions": they intend to make

themselves "applicable to (allegorizable to) unforeseen situations."[244] Drawing on—among other examples—the Fourteenth Amendment, Hirsch points out that writers frequently "intend their writings to have meanings that go unforeseeably beyond their original literal contents" (Allegory 555). He goes on to build an interpretive model sensitive to this insight; drawing on Augustine's analysis of allegory, he writes:

> The problem that Augustine set himself was whether there was in principle any such thing as an incorrect allegory. His answer was "yes." An allegory is wrong if it is untrue to the spirit of the original intent. Interpretation must always go beyond the writer's letter, but never beyond the writer's spirit. And the writer's spirit is determined not simply by abstract theological speculation about the nature of God's truth, but is rooted in what Moses historically intended. (557-58)

The careful demarcation here is essential. The interpreter must go beyond the literal content upon detecting the allegorical intention; to do otherwise is to dismiss the spirit of the text for the letter. But he must never let this "going beyond" stretch too far away from the letter of the text, for this is another way of dismissing the spirit—after all, his sense of the spirit is based entirely upon the writer's literal, historical intention. What Hirsch is talking about here is very close to the necessary imbrication of historical and rational reconstruction. Respecting the spirit of texts requires that one try to make as much sense of them as possible, going beyond their strict historical meaning when doing so is required by their allegorical intentions; to do this is to respond to the writer's "spirit."

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[244] "Transhistorical Intentions and the Persistence of Allegory," *New Literary History* 25.3 (Summer 1994): 549-567, 552. Further citations to this essay are marked "Allegory" and included parenthetically in the text.

One might well wonder how to know if a text intends readers to take it allegorically, and it seems to me that overt statements of ideas necessarily intend precisely this.[245] Let us take as an example a statement central to my interpretation of Eliot, the *Middlemarch* narrator's remark that "there is no general doctrine which is not capable of eating out our morality if unchecked by the deep-seated habit of direct fellow-feeling with individual fellow-men." Now, certainly, one needs to reconstruct this historically, considering what Eliot means by the word "doctrine" and how—to borrow from Pocock—her use of the word "fellow-feeling" reflects an instance of the broader ethico-political "language" of sympathy common to the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Upon finishing this reconstruction, however, grasping the logic of the statement seems necessarily to require more than this; after all, the statement does not say, "there is no general doctrine available to us in the Victorian era." Rather, Eliot's narrator means to be making a statement of general philosophical truth, and the critic does a disservice to the novel by failing to engage it on that level. In this sense, anachronistically wondering whether one of our contemporary "doctrines" could pass Eliot's test, or whether—as I have attempted to argue—Eliot means to describe a general principle for moral growth as a rival to other theories of moral decision-making, would constitute ways of responding to the "spirit" of the text, of reconstructing it "rationally," and of recognizing the philosophical ideas it "implies."

This view is, I think, a version of Gadamer's hermeneutics. He writes:

> Precisely because it entirely detaches the sense of what is said from the person saying it, the written word makes the understanding reader the arbiter

[245] Let me acknowledge that this is not Hirsch's view, which attributes allegorical intentions on a significantly broader basis than my view does. Hirsh writes: "allegorical intentions are always implicit in the most typical form of literature, the story. Why should anyone be interested in a story that lacks analogical applications to his or her own experience?" (Allegory 553). Without wanting to press the point with too much force, this seems to me to widen a useful concept too far; for instance, it is not clear to me why the act of telling a story implies the storyteller's belief that everyone ought to be interested in it.

> of its claim to truth. The reader experiences what is addressed to him and what he understands in all its validity. What he understands is always more than an unfamiliar opinion: it is always possible truth.[246]

Now, following Skinner and Hirsch, I am not sure that the text is "entirely detached" from the person speaking it; nevertheless, I have a deep sympathy for Gadamer's point here. To encounter a written statement of an idea is always to engage it as potentially true for oneself, now: this is what I think Gadamer means by saying that it is always "possible truth," not just an "unfamiliar opinion" that must be placed in some other context to become comprehensible. And per Gadamer, it seems to me that we might redescribe the relationship between historical and rational reconstruction as a version of the hermeneutic circle. As Rorty puts it, the two tasks "will continually be correcting and updating the other" ("Introduction" 10). Thus, one reconstructs historically an author's intention to address a certain issue; then, upon discovering that she intended to make a statement of general philosophical truth, one rationally and anachronistically extends that account. However, grasping the way she would extend that view requires further historical reconstruction, and the process thus continues. Certainly, I have tried to practice such an alternation in my interpretation of Eliot, moving back and forth between contemporary readings of Kant, Eliot's own reading in Feuerbach, and philosophical material from her nonfiction.

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The defense of presentism I have laid out here thus relies heavily on overt theoretical statements in a text. But this sort of criticism has not always been—indeed, perhaps rarely has it been—what literary critics had in mind in using anachronistic theoretical frames; rather, interpreters have often relied on situating their reading of a literary text inside a frame

[246] Hans-Georg, Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 1975): 396.

of ideas not at all openly invoked in the text itself, and I want to conclude by briefly remarking on these alternative presentist methodologies.

Perhaps the most famous presentist approach is the symptomatic criticism developed by Marxist and psychoanalytic critics, and the conversation here ultimately has little to say to such interpretations. There is an analogy in the history of ideas: Skinner developed his arguments in part as an alternative to the Marxist approach common in the history of ideas in the middle of the twentieth century.[247] The reason these kinds of criticism are not affected by my arguments is that such critics generally do not hold the linguistic theory that underlies Skinner's arguments and my own: it is not an objection to Fredric Jameson, for example, to suggest that the writers he interprets do not intend to make political statements. This dismissal of intention is deeply related to the sense in which he is recovering a political "unconscious": his version of presentism, in the form of Marxist theory, finds its warrant through "restoring to the surface of the text the repressed and buried reality" of class struggle.[248] Similarly for the psychoanalytic critic: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's use of contemporary gender theory, for example, re-interprets various ideas in the nineteenth-century novel as symptoms of the repression of same-sex desire.[249] In addition, deconstructive criticism, depending as it does on claims about the nature of textuality, similarly can be un-problematically presentist. Such theories are of course dependent on the larger arguments that warrant their position: that is, Jameson's position requires an argument

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[247] Thus Skinner writes that the Marxists insist "that the principles professed in political life are commonly the merest rationalizations of quite different motives and impulses," and that "it follows from this that such principles play no causal role in political life." "Analysis of Political Thought and Action," *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics*. Ed. James Tully (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988): 97-118, 109. The discussion is subtle, but essentially Skinner sees the dispute as involving a philosophical question about the role evaluative principles play in the causation of action. The relevant point for us is that the difference between Skinner and the Marxist is not precisely historiographical, but rather philosophical, and thus only relevant for interpretive methodology a removed level.

[248] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

[249] *The Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

about the nature of reality and of linguistic behavior in relationship to it, such that reality might plausibly leave symptomatic traces in a speaker's behavior. But one must assess the position at this larger level, and my own worry about anachronistic theoretical criticism need not be troubling.

Such presentism becomes potentially objectionable, however, when critics are inclined to posit authorial awareness of the dynamic whose presence they have first detected through its symptoms. These interpretations must negotiate a complex set of commitments regarding the nature of linguistic behavior, holding that on the one hand it is the product of forces a writer is not and perhaps cannot be aware of, and that on the other it is the product of reflective awareness and intentional action. Such an issue is related to what Amanda Anderson has called "aggrandized agency"; she writes that in the work of some feminist cultural historians there is an odd tension in the portrayal of certain female figures: "on the one hand […] feminine agency is imagined as continuous with unreflective forms of power that are simply transmitted by culturally embedded subjects. Yet on the other hand, strange exceptions occur, wherein certain historical subjects are exempted from networks of power, and consequently accorded what I will characterize as 'aggrandized agency.'"[250] The point here is that such critics want, roughly speaking, to have it both ways: the figures they consider are at once subject to constitutive and determinative historical forces, while simultaneously aware of and detached far enough from such forces to manipulate them. This notion of agency is philosophically incoherent, or at least problematic: as Anderson notes, such figures as Mary Poovey's Florence Nightingale "become endowed with an uncanny ability to understand and manipulate the whole of Victorian ideology" (54). We might extend this notion of aggrandized agency to the discovery of anachronistic insights in writers whose

[250] "The Temptations of Aggrandized Agency:: Feminist Histories and the Horizon of Modernity." *The Way We Argue Now: A Study in the Cultures of Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006): 46-66, 47.

work otherwise bears the symptoms of larger historical—or psychological, or linguistic—forces.

To cite a few examples of what I mean—staying with George Eliot for a moment—consider Mary Jean Corbett's essay, "Representing the Rural: The Critique of Loamshire in *Adam Bede*."[251] On the one hand, Corbett posits a good deal of agency and intention in Eliot's writing, suggesting that Eliot "attempts to unsettle the ideological assumptions of her audience," that her fiction "deliberately subverts those who try to read it as pastoral myth or neat moral fable," and that "she strategically encourages us to understand our 'overlooking'" ((289; 294; 295). On the other hand, Corbett's Eliot is also the victim of certain elements of Victorian ideology: Corbett sees Eliot's "incompletely articulated attack" on the Philistinism of the Poysers as "symptomatic of Eliot's own inability to carry out the ideological function of the Victorian author" (299). What is odd here is neither pole of the position, but their combination: if *Adam Bede* offers evidence that Eliot is aware of Victorian ideology in such a way that she can attempt to unsettle it, then it is unclear how it can also offer evidence of Eliot's lack of awareness of the ideology in such a way where it can leave unconscious symptoms in her work, in the form of the representation of the Poyser family. Similarly, Ann Cvetkovich claims that in *Daniel Deronda* Eliot offers "a form of feminist politics" in her realistic depiction of the Gwendolen Harleth subplot, since she thus "provides access to a character who would otherwise be invisible"; nonetheless, this "psychological realism" remains "symptomatic of the problem of women's place in history," because it takes for granted "the conditions that make women's lives primarily interior" (*Mixed Feelings* 131; 132). Again, Eliot is oddly above and below the level of ideology, interrogating it through her representation of Gwendolen, but subject to it in her realist form.

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[251] "Representing the Rural: The Critique of Loamshire in *Adam Bede*." *Studies in the Novel* 20.3 (Fall 1988): 288-301. Citations included parenthetically in the text.

As I have suggested, such interpretive strategies require a complex account of linguistic behavior that is not immediately obvious. Perhaps because the critic first introduces the anachronistic theory on the grounds of its extra-textual validity, whose relevance is discernible through subtle and unconscious "symptoms," such critics leave unclear how to specify the content of the awareness they are attributing to the authors in question. It is precisely here where historical reconstruction should find its value and operate as a constraint on rational reconstruction.

To see this point, consider D.A. Miller's reading of *Middlemarch*, which starts from a sense of the novel's combination of "deconstructive insights" with "a confident reenactment of traditional form" (107-108). An essential piece of evidence for his interpretation is Dorothea Casaubon's remark that in marriage with Casaubon, "Everyday-things with us would mean the greatest things" (137). He glosses Dorothea as desiring "a world in which daily experience would have a cognitive transparency, and conduct would immediately translate into the moral necessity of duty" (138). Significantly, he invokes anachronistic concepts to make sense of this "cognitive transparency": the tension of the novel depends on the "ambiguous status of the everyday," since it is "a signifier," which Dorothea "must raise into high meaningfulness," and "a signified, already meaningful in the community's competing system of interpretation" (137). Now, a historically reconstructed Eliot could not agree with this description: Miller's translation of Dorothea's words into structuralist terms like "signifier" requires anachronistic phrasing. As I suggested in the last chapter, my own sense is that Dorothea and Eliot are more concerned with the question of a purposeful life, rather than anything involving a problem of interpretation. This fact licenses a certain kind of anachronism: it is reasonable to consider contemporary debates about the meaning of life and situate Eliot within them. However, it precludes Miller's anachronism, since a

historically reconstructed Eliot is not interested in the philosophy of language: to put it in my terms, Miller's reconstruction violates the spirit of Eliot's text.[252] I suspect that what leads him to this violation is the initial symptomatic detection of deconstructive elements in *Middlemarch's* complexities.

I do not wish to deny that one can deconstruct *Middlemarch* to great effect. I do wish to deny that critics can refer meaningfully to Eliot's "deconstructive insights." Once an interpreter is inclined to posit not merely that a theoretical debate is relevant to a literary text, but that it is relevant because an author is in some fashion aware of the issues involved, then it seems to me all of Skinner's worries about anachronistic interpretation return to the fore. And while I hope to have marked out in this interlude an argument that sometimes such anachronism is necessary, I hope also to have suggested that executing it requires a good deal of rigor.

[252] Of course, someone might wish to challenge this claim: certainly Eliot was interested in biblical hermeneutics, and perhaps one might offer a view whereby she has a coherent position in the discourse of the philosophy of language, within which the deconstructive thinkers in the background of Miller's thought might usefully clarify debates in the same way David Velleman has done in my account. But what I wish to insist on is that this reconstruction is necessary, and that in so doing it will of necessity appeal to things Eliot actually thought. It is the notion that one can justify anachronism symptomatically that I wish to challenge.

From Moral Psychology to Metaethics: Sidgwick, Eliot, and Meredith on Egoism

One of the deep problems in nineteenth-century thought involved the question of the foundations of moral laws. As John Stuart Mill puts it, "The question is often asked, and properly so, in regard to any supposed moral standard—What is its sanction? What are the motives to obey? Or, more specifically, what is the source of its obligation? Whence does it derive its binding force?"[253] Mill is looking, in other words, for an explanation of "normativity": for an account as to how it is it can be true that agents are obliged to do something. Contemporary moral philosophers have come to call the domain of such accounts "metaethics," the field of explanations for the peculiar nature of Mill's "binding force," but this is very much a contemporary inheritance of nineteenth-century problems.

Of course, Mill and the other Victorians in turn inherited it from a previous tradition: in the English context, the problem of moral foundations stems from the eighteenth-century tradition in moral philosophy, and in particular the work of David Hume. In his 1739 text, *A Treatise on Human Nature*. Hume famously remarks:

> In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary ways of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when all of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find, that instead of the usual

[253] Mill, John Stuart, "Utilitarianism." In *Utilitarianism and Other Essays*. Ed. Alan Ryan (New York: Penguin, 1987): 298. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

> copulations of propositions, *is*, and *is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought*, or an *ought not*. This change is imperceptible; but is however, of the last consequence. For as this *ought*, or *ought not*, that expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it shou'd be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason should be given; for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it.[254]

What Hume describes here is the peculiar nature of the truth value of statements of obligation, and how it differs from our ordinary understanding of truth. Statements of fact, or "is" statements, are of one sort: they claim that some given set of conditions obtains. Statements of obligation, or "ought" statements, however, are of another sort: they claim that agents have some kind of duty. Hume here is at pains to point out that statements of the second kind cannot follow logically from statements of the first kind; in short, one cannot derive an "ought" from an "is."

Hume's problem has proven difficult to solve, to say the least; certainly, Victorian thinkers could not come to a consensus on a solution. And, perhaps as a result of increasing religious skepticism, the problem seemed increasingly pressing: in a world without God guaranteeing moral obligations, the question as to why agents ought to behave well took on a new urgency. This context, it seems to me, is the relevant background for explaining the Victorian fascination with "egoism." The egoist, after all, is a threat precisely to the normativity of moral laws: this is why Nietzsche famously described the "immoralist" as a

[254] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960): 469. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

philosophical challenge.[255] As other scholars have noted, the terms "egoism" and "altruism" enter the English language as ethical terms in the nineteenth century, and moral philosophers—indeed, thinkers from a variety of disciplines—increasingly came to see the fundamental problem of ethics as involving the tension between "self-regarding" and "other-regarding" impulses.[256]

Crucially, a number of novelists saw ethics this way as well—and in so doing, they addressed the fundamental philosophical problem. In the last chapter, I regarded egoism in George Eliot as mainly an issue in moral psychology: the question was how to deliberate in such a way that the agent attended properly to the interests of others.[257] Since the egoist is not merely a deliberative problem, however, but also a metaethical issue, the novelist's representation of what exactly is wrong with egoism can point to an explanation of the sources of normative obligation. In other words, a novelist's account of agency can say something about her metaethics; indeed, as this chapter will suggest, novelists like Eliot and George Meredith quite consciously reflect on their depictions of egoism in just this light.

When such novels are read as metaethical accounts, moreover, they reveal some surprising and insightful divergences from the philosophical tradition. In the analysis given in his 1874 treatise *The Methods of Ethics*, which Derek Parfit has recently called the best account of egoism philosophers have yet offered, Henry Sidgwick describes the egoist as fundamentally embodying a particular form of rationality, one centered on self-interest.[258] When conceived this way, the question of the foundations of normativity turns out to hinge

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[255] Phillipa Foot describes this aspect of Nietzsche's thought and the challenge it presents to morality in *Natural Goodness* (New York: Oxford, 2003).
[256] Thomas Dixon, *The Invention of Altruism: Making Moral Meanings in Victorian Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 2. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.
[257] "Moral psychology" is at once an old and new field, roughly referring to analyses of the nature of agency. The literature in this field is now vast, but the introductory description by John Doris and Stephen Stich, "Moral Psychology," in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2006 edition) is excellent. Available at http://plato.stanford.edu.
[258] Derek Parfit, *On What Matters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011): xli.

on a tension between two different ways of being rational; as Sidgwick puts it, there is a "profound discrepancy between the natural end of action—private happiness, and the end of duty—general happiness."[259] The tension between these two norms of rationality, which Sidgwick eventually terms the "Dualism of Practical Reason," is, in his analysis, ultimately insoluble. In other words, actions that maximize my own happiness are rational on the grounds of egoism, while actions that maximize overall or aggregate happiness are rational on the grounds of objectivity. And if I am ever confronted by a choice where one action is in my own best interests while another incompatible action is in the best interests of everyone else, then the honest moral philosopher, according to Sidgwick, must ultimately throw up his hands and admit that both actions are equally reasonable and justifiable. As Sidgwick, with some dramatic flair, puts it, the "Cosmos of Duty is thereby reduced to a Chaos."[260]

It is worth keeping in mind, however, that the insolubility of the problem stems from a certain way of defining what it is: in particular, the problem stems from the conception of the egoist as embodying a form of rationality. Neo-Kantian philosophers like Korsgaard and Velleman have tendeded to resist this notion, offering "constitutivist" accounts of the foundations of morality. On these views, being moral is essentially identical with being fully rational: the rules of morality are constitutive features of agency, and thus the obligation to be moral and the obligation to be rational stem from essentially the same source—the human capacity to be self-governed. When their representations of egoism are read with an eye towards the problem of normativity, moreover, both George Eliot and George Meredith

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[259] *The Methods of Ethics* (Hackett: Indianapolis, 1981), xvii. Further citations included parenthetically in the text. The preface quoted here is from the seventh edition, which was compiled in 1907 after Sidgwick's death. As the editor of that edition, K.K. Constance Jones, explains, the material is in fact "notes for a lecture," which contain "a brief history of the development in his thought of the ethical view which he has set forth in *The Methods*" (xvi-xvii). As such, it is perhaps best thought of as a preface in part from the editor, rather than directly from the author.

[260] This phrase is from the dramatic conclusion of the first edition of the *Methods* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1874): 473, and was revised in tone (though not in fundamental philosophical content) in later editions.

anticipate such accounts: in their depictions, egoism importantly represents a failure of agency—though, significantly, they differ in the ways they describe this failure.

This chapter will thus work through each author's account of the sources of normativity, as expressed through their representation of egoism. It will do so in three movements: the first will offer a brief reading of Sidgwick's *Methods of Ethics*, showing more substantially how the insolubility of the "Dualism of Practical Reason" grows out of his description of the egoist. The second movement will turn to Eliot, and complete the description of her account of sympathy through an interpretation of scenes of sympathetic "awakening," where egoists suddenly come to recognize the moral importance of others; I will argue that Eliot relies on the idea that agency necessarily requires a certain kind of self-approval. The third and final movement centers on George Meredith's *The Egoist*, arguing that the insights contained in its description of the irrationality of egoism appear most illuminating as an answer to a fundamental problem within the constitutivist approach—the question of the psychology of bad action.

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Sidgwick develops his own account of the foundations of morality in response to J. S. Mill's "proof" of the principle of utility, which contended that the fact that agents pursue their own individual happiness demonstrates that all agents must pursue the collective happiness. In Mill's words:

> No reason can be given why the general happiness is desirable, except that each person, so far as he believes it to be attainable, desires his own happiness. This, however, being a fact, we have not only all the proof which the case admits of, but which it is possible to require […] each person's happiness is a good to that person, and the general happiness, therefore, a good to the aggregate of all persons (39).

Now there is a clear problem here. Mill has not explained why the fact that I have a desire to pursue my own happiness means that I have a desire to pursue the happiness of others. In other words, the link between the last two clauses of the passage remains troublingly without defense: it is not apparent how the claim that the "general happiness is a good to the aggregate of persons" follows from the claim that happiness is a good to each person.

Sidgwick presses Mill on precisely this point:

> [A]n aggregate of actual desires, each directed towards a different part of the general happiness, does not constitute an actual desire for the general happiness, existing in any individual, and Mill would certainly not contend that a desire which does not exist in any individual can possibly exist in an aggregate of individuals. (388)

Here, Sidgwick is resisting the aggregating move Mill relies upon. Although it is true I desire to be happy, and that I thus have a desire directed at a "part" of the general happiness, this does not "constitute a desire for the general happiness," and thus it cannot be said that the general happiness is desirable for each individual agent. Sidgwick is motivated primarily by a sense of a tension between one's own benefit and the total benefit to others; as he puts it at one point, "practical conflict in ordinary human minds is mainly between Self-interest and Social Duty however determined," and Mill's answer, fairly clearly, will not address this problem (87).

Sidgwick thus moves to the more basic level of instrumental rationality, as offering a starting point in the form of a kind of normativity even the egoist can accept. He writes:

> [E]ven those who hold that moral rules are only obligatory because it is the individual's interest to conform to them—thus regarding them as a particular species of prudential rules—do not thereby get rid of 'the dictate of reason,' so far as they recognize private interest or happiness as an end at which it is ultimately reasonable

> to aim. The conflict of Practical Reason with irrational desire remains an indubitable fact of our conscious experience, even if practical reason is interpreted to mean merely self-regarding Prudence […] Thus the notion 'ought'—as expressing the relation of rational judgment to non-rational impulses—will find a place in the practical rules of any egoistic system, no less than in the rules of ordinary morality (36).

Sidgwick's point here is that normativity—in his words, the "notion 'ought'"—is not unique to morality. Even agents who deny the force of moral obligations, and only behave in a way we would call ethical when it serves their own interests, still confront moments of "irrational desire," where they have judged a thing to be worth doing and yet can't bring themselves to do it. An example here might be a lazy murderer: having decided to kill his annoying neighbor but unable to get out of bed, such an egoist could meaningfully recognize himself as bound by the rule "you ought to get up now," even though the normative force arises from his adoption of the end of murdering. More technically, as Sidgwick puts it a moment later, this is simply the normativity of what Kant would call a "hypothetical imperative": having adopted a given end, I am "required" to will any means necessary to that end (37).

But there is another, slightly more substantive sense at play: Sidgwick thinks even the egoist—indeed, especially the egoist—is rationally obligated to pursue her own happiness. This is an importantly common-sense notion: "We do not all look with simple indifference," Sidgwick remarks, "on a man who declines to take the right means to attain his own happiness, on no other ground than that he does not care about happiness. Most men would regard such a refusal as irrational […] they would thus implicitly assent to [Joseph] Butler's statement that 'interest, one's own happiness, is a manifest obligation'" (7). Sidgwick means his claim to be intuitive: what he has in mind are agents who have a clear and obvious goal

(say, someone is hungry) and easily available means to realize it (say, she has a sandwich on a plate in front of her). Let us suppose that this woman were to avoid eating the sandwich and continue complaining about her hunger. Furthermore, if we ask her why she won't eat the sandwich, she explains that although doing so will certainly make her less hungry and therefore happier, she doesn't see why those facts give her any reason to actually eat the sandwich. Such a person, Sidgwick thinks, would strike us as clearly irrational, and it is this sense of rationality he means to draw out when he says "a man ought to care for his own happiness" (7). As Jerome Schneewind puts it in his analysis of Sidgwick, "One might even take [this sort of egoistic rationality] to articulate the central strand in the ordinary idea of what it is for someone to act reasonably."[261]

This attitude culminates in the presentation of the method of "ethics"—that is, normativity—Sidgwick calls "Egoistic Hedonism": it is here that Sidgwick's conception of egoism emerges. On this view, he explains, "the rational agent regards quantity of pleasure and pain to himself as alone important in choosing between alternatives of action" (95). The emphasis on choice here is significant; Sidgwick thinks that the egoist is best recognized as such in moments of deliberation. As he puts it elsewhere, "we must therefore understand by an Egoist a man who when two or more courses of action are open to him, ascertains as accurately as he can the amounts of pleasure and pain that are likely to result from each, and chooses the one which he thinks will yield him the greatest surplus of pleasure over pain" (121). This is to suggest that egoism is best understood as a certain kind of deliberative procedure, which may or may not be instantiated in any particular individual.

Previous philosophers have tended to conclude too easily that egoism is irrational, Sidgwick thinks; in particular, the rational egoist can pass Kant's categorical imperative test:

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[261] Jerome Schneewind, *Sidgwick's Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977): 353. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

> I quite admit that when the painful necessity comes for another man to choose between his own happiness and the general happiness, he must as a reasonable being prefer his own, *i.e.* it is right for him to do this on my principle. No doubt, as I probably do not sympathize with him in particular any more than with any other person, I as a disengaged spectator should like him to sacrifice himself to the general good: but I do not expect him to do it, any more than I should do it myself in his place. (xix-xx)

The point here is that it possible for an egoist to accept the egoism of everyone else without contradiction. After all, Kant's test is supposed to be just this: whether the law an agent on which acts could be thought of as a law for everyone else in similar situations. Sidgwick's point is that the egoist can do this easily: while he might like another agent to "sacrifice himself to the general good," there is no contradiction in believing that the other agent should not do this, in the same way and for the same reasons that the egoist himself would not.

Now, one might reply that this displays an irrational partiality towards the egoist's happiness. Sidgwick puts the response in the mouth of the utilitarian, but in some important ways it echoes a key Kantian theme. The notion is this: "The good of any one individual is of no more importance, from the point of view (if I may say so) of the Universe, than the good of any other […] and it is evident to me that as a rational being I am bound to aim at good generally, so far as it is attainable by my efforts,—not merely at a particular point of it" (382). In other words, there can be no objective reason why any one person's happiness is more or less worthy of maximization than any other person's, even if the deliberating agent happens to be one of the persons involved. Moreover, if the egoist commits himself to the notion that his happiness is "good, not only *for him* but from the point of view of the

universe" then this argument will be successful in demonstrating that egoism is less rational than benevolence or "Universalistic Hedonism" (420).

However, the egoist need not so commit himself: such an agent can plausibly deny the existence of any good from the objective point of view and hold simply that all goods are "goods for"—that is, they are made good by the perspective of an agent who seeks to realize them. In Sidgwick's words, "If the Egoist strictly confines himself to stating his conviction that he ought to take his own happiness or pleasure as his ultimate end, there seems no opening to lead him to Universalistic Hedonism as a first principle; it cannot be proved that the difference between his own happiness and another's happiness is not *for him* all-important" (420). Crucial here is the distinction between the self and another person; the Egoist ultimately relies on the fundamental distinction between people.

Compellingly, Sidgwick admits that someone might doubt this point, but he thinks the egoist can plausibly rely on everyday intuitions about psychology:

> It would be contrary to Common Sense to deny that the distinction between any one individual and any other is real and fundamental, and that consequently "I" am concerned with the quality of my existence as an individual in a sense, fundamentally important, in which I am not concerned with the quality of the existence of other individuals (498).

The revealing idea here is the fundamental privacy behind the egoist's conception of rational obligation. At the heart of her position, and underlying her response to the universalistic hedonist's charge that she is guilty of an unjustified partiality, is her common-sensical notion of a distinction between herself and others: it is "fundamentally important" that she is concerned with the quality of her existence in a way other people need not be.

Taken as it stands, the argument might be worthy of challenge on its own, but it becomes more so when compared with another argument, contained in what Schneewind calls "one of the most interesting passages of the *Methods*" (367). Sidgwick remarks:

> From the point of view, indeed, of abstract philosophy, I do not see why the Egoistic principle should pass unchallenged any more than the Universalistic. I do not see why the axiom of Prudence should not be questioned, when it conflicts with present inclination, on a ground similar to that on which Egoists refuse to admit the axiom of Rational Benevolence. If the Utilitarian has to answer the question, 'Why should I sacrifice my own happiness for the greater happiness of another?' it must surely be admissible to ask the Egoist, 'Why should I sacrifice a present pleasure for a greater one in the future?' (418).

The point here is that rational egoism is not quite so axiomatic and obviously sensible as it at first appears to be. In moments where I have a strong desire that appears to conflict with my overall happiness—think back to the lazy murderer—it is not obvious why I ought to dismiss the desire. Admittedly, acting on its basis will not maximize my total happiness. But—so the skeptic here remarks—it is not clear how that generates a reason not to do it. As Sidgwick notes, the argument is structurally parallel to the egoist's challenge to the idea of rational benevolence: in the same way that the egoist saw no reason to prefer greater total happiness to his own, so the challenger of the principle of prudence sees no reason to prefer maximization of his overall happiness to the instant gratification of a given desire.

Sidgwick's response is revealing: having brought up this insightful challenge to egoism, he says that he "will not press this question now, since […] Common Sense does not think it worth while to supply the individual with reasons for seeking his own interest" (419). Again, there is a fall back to common sense: Sidgwick thinks it is more or less

intuitively obvious that individuals have something called "their interest," which it is reasonable to pursue, even in situations where local inclinations push the agent away from it.

At two crucial moments in the argument—in explaining why individuals have a reason to prefer their own individual happiness over total happiness, and in explaining why they have a reason to prefer the maximization of happiness over the course of their lives as opposed to following the inclinations they feel at any given moment—Sidgwick thus falls back on unanalyzed common-sense notions about the self. Importantly, the two notions are opposed. The response to the universalistic hedonist relies on immediate phenomenology, since it privileges our conscious experience of happiness as opposed to the experience of others, to which we lack immediate access. But the second response *denies* the validity of immediate phenomenology, since it suggests there is something called one's "interests," which govern rationality over and above the inclinations one feels at a particular time. This tension between these two common-sense assumptions about the self is precisely the gap that the constitutivist approach exploits in arguing that normativity is just a form of rationality: any account that sufficiently explains why one has a reason to care about one's own interests, such thinkers argue, will also explain why one has a reason to care about the interests of others.[262]

To explain the constitutivist contention more fully, let us turn first to Christine Korsgaard's version of the argument, and in particular her reiteration of the problem of prudence: "just as the individual person whose happiness is sacrificed for the sake of overall utility seems to have some right to protest, so also the individual desire whose satisfaction is sacrificed seems to have some right to protest"; in other words, overruling a momentary desire for the sake of an agent's greater happiness seems to lack clear rational warrant—

[262] See Christine Korsgaard, "The Myth of Egoism," in *The Constitution of Agency* (New York: Oxford, 2008): 69-100. Further citations included parenthetically in the text, as "MoE" and page number.

glossed more simply, the question is, "Why should I be prudent?"[263] Korsgaard offers as an example of the problem here someone who prefers a penny to a dollar. This might seem to be a clear case of imprudence, because the penny and dollar are measurable on the same scale; certainly, Korsgaard notes, there is a much better case to be made here than in that of the agent who prefers "a torrid though ultimately heartbreaking affair to a lifetime of amicable matrimony" (SC 53). In this latter case, the fact that there is more total affection in the latter doesn't seem particularly relevant. Even though the love affair and the marriage share a "common experience," the notion that calculation of this common experience constitutes an assessment of their respective value is obviously implausible.

Even in the case of the dollar and the penny, however, things are less clear than they seem. Korsgaard writes:

> If I want to buy a piece of penny candy, the instrumental principle [which commands me to take the means to my ends] judges a penny and a dollar to be *equally good* means so far as *that* end is concerned. It is only on the assumption that I ought to pursue or stand ready to pursue more than one of my ends, and also of course that my other ends might cost money, that I am *required* to prefer the dollar to the penny. (SC 53)

The point here is that the seemingly obvious irrationality of preferring pennies to dollars depends upon a background assumption that satisfying more ends is better than satisfying fewer. But as Korsgaard goes on to note, this is a "substantive conception of the good," which is to say that it relies on a nontrivial belief that that maximal desire-satisfaction is the *best* thing an agent could do. It is worth pointing out that it is not just the psychological belief that such action will make the agent happiest, because this claim by itself doesn't

[263] *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009): 54. Further citations included parenthetically in the text, as "SC" and page number.

generate rational norms. The philosopher defending rational egoism has to hold the further claim that agents *ought* to try to be as happy as possible.

And that claim, Korsgaard thinks, can't be proven.[264] This is not to deny the fact that the person who prefers pennies to dollars really is a little irrational, though Korsgaard doesn't think philosophers have yet articulated a principle that captures the injunction to prefer "the achievement of a conjunction of our ends to the achievement of any one of them"; she calls this gap the "missing principle" (SC 57). She is nonetheless convinced that, whatever that precise principle turns out to be, the source of its normative force is obvious. In her words, "a formal principle for balancing our various ends and reasons must be a principle for unifying our agency, since that is so exactly why we need it: so that we are not always tripping over ourselves when we pursue our various projects, so that our agency is not incoherent" (SC 58). The point here is that, in explaining how to integrate the pursuits of our ends with each other, the missing principle will necessarily be about how to reconcile the various parts of ourselves, since it is the fact of this partition that gives rise to the problem in the first place. Reconciling the parts of oneself in a way that unifies one's agency crucially opens up a gap, however, in which constitutivist approaches like Korsgaard's insist that recognition of the respect due to other people must play a role. It is in this light, moreover, where George Eliot and George Meredith reveal philosophical insight: their varied portrayals of the way egoists fail to constitute themselves in an agency-unifying way reveal the extent to which they see moral obligations as stemming from the requirements for agency.

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[264] The details of her argument are athwart my purposes here, but Korsgaard's broad strategy is to focus on the supposedly automatic move from the fact that it is rational to want to satisfy a given desire to the the claim that it is rational to maximize one's happiness. The problem, she argues, is that this doesn't justify the principle of prudence. That issue arose, after all, in moments where agents felt immediate desires whose satisfaction was incompatible with what they judged to be their overall happiness. Since the ultimate ground for the injunction to be happy is the fact that the agent desires her happiness, then the two competing claims both have the same backing, in being desired. In Korsgaard's words, "each of the person's particular desires has exactly the same kind of normative claim on her that her happiness does" (SC 55).

* * *

George Eliot's reflections on the foundations of normativity emerge most clearly in a somewhat surprising place—her revision of the final volume of G. H. Lewes's *The Problems of Life and Mind*. Significantly, Eliot revises a section entitled "The Moral Sense" in a way that suggests her deep awareness of the problems involved in the Humean problem of deriving an "ought" from an "is"; K.K. Collins, the scholar who first noticed the extent of her revisions, puts it thus: "Eliot recognizes that the fact that we do not dine on poison cannot provide the basis for substantiating a binding moral principle that we should not dine on poison" (474).[265] It is in the nature of these revisions that Eliot's thinking about the sources of moral obligation emerges.

In Lewes's original text, his project is to show the malleability of moral beliefs to external forces; he argues that "conscience" is a "social product" (484). Lewes borrows in support of this argument Darwin's claim about the similarity between men and bees, quoting Darwin thus: if "men were reared under precisely the same conditions as hive bees there could hardly be a doubt that our unmarried females would, like the worker bees, think it a sacred duty to kill their brothers" (486-7).[266] To the extent that there is a difference between men and animals in morality for Lewes, it depends on the extent to which men can internalize the forces of social approbation. It is true, for instance, that animals cannot look back and regret their actions, while men can. But this fact does not reveal a different kind of

[265] K.K. Collins, "G.H. Lewes Revised: George Eliot and 'The Moral Sense.'" The analysis in this section heavily indebted to Collins's scholarship, particularly his inclusion in an appendix of Eliot's revised version of "The Moral Sense" alongside Lewes's original text.

[266] It is perhaps worth mentioning here that this evolution, in Lewes's view, occurs socially, rather than genetically. He speaks dismissively of "some writers, who are disposed to exaggerate the action of heredity"; such figures believe that certain experiences of social utility in the race become organized in descendants and are thus transmitted as instincts" (490). Lewes is suspicions: "I should rather look for the transmission through Language and other social institutions" (491). Somewhat ironically, Eliot is more willing to consider the possibility of genetically involved instincts, editing the passage to include a disclaimer; thus, it becomes, "With the demonstrated wonders of heredity before us, it is rash to fix limits to the specific determinations it may include, but the evidence in this direction is obscured by the indubitable transmission through language and other social institutions" (491).

moral force. Rather, the same sort of constructs that govern dogs and bees govern men as well: the human capacity for regret just permits the possibility of new, more complex forms of internalization.

In her revision, Eliot refuses to collapse the distinction between men and animals in the way Lewes seems inclined.[267] While Lewes is interested in reducing the internalization of social considerations to its fundamentally animalistic motivations, Eliot stresses the difference such internalization implies:

> But in the less endowed specimens of our race, even within the reach of culture, the response to the moral demands of society, whether in the shape of doctrine or of institutions, is little more than the conflict of opposing appetites, the check imposed by egoistic dread on egoistic desire. It is a great progress beyond this brute dread of the stick when the love of approbation attains the ideal force which renders social rule or custom and the respect of fellow-men an habitually felt restraint and guidance. Even within this limit we see the human sentience attaining a mark utterly beyond the reach of our most intelligent inarticulate companion, the dog. (485)

Eliot's point here is that there is a qualitative distinction to make between kinds of internalization. Merely considering the cost of social disapproval against the value of the satisfaction of a censured desire is not much progress, Eliot thinks; it is simply to impose the check of "egoistic dread" on egoistic desire. However, when the love of approbation becomes a motivating force in itself, something rather different happens. Agents then perform actions in an importantly selfless way, doing them because they are beloved by society, rather than because the agent will reap the reward of society's blessing. It is because

[267] For instance, while she keeps Lewes's claims about the bees, she adds the following: "To make the comparison luminous, we must shade our eyes from the impossibility of human organisms being subjected to precisely the same conditions as hive-bees" (487). One can almost hear Eliot gritting her teeth.

of this selflessness that it represents a progress beyond the "brute dread of the stick," and indeed something like this is necessary to explain the existence of martyrs, Eliot argues, since they demonstrate that the "Moral Sense" can ultimate produce the "repudiation of immediate sympathy for the sake of a foreseen general good" (486).

Her emphasis on the distinctiveness of human agency points to the way Eliot negotiates the tension between a fact about human agents and a normative rule—between, in other words, an "is" and an "ought." The psychological features that create the distinction between men and animals are crucially causal, since the love of approbation necessarily leads to a certain kind of recognition of others:

> [T]he aggressive and defensive impulses […] would remain fiercely and solely egoistic but for that sense of dependence on individual beings or other-selves which lies implicitly in the sexual and parental relations. With the enlargement of the mental range in the human being, and under that influence of the social medium which raises emotions into sentiments, the consciousness of dependence is the continual check on the egoistic desires, and the continual source of that interest in the experience of others which is the wakener of sympathy. (491)

The point here is that there is a fact about the "mental range in the human being": it is the "consciousness of dependence" on others, initially parents and other loved ones. This consciousness, the "love of approbation" under a different description, operates as a "source" for the attention to others. And as Eliot famously puts it elsewhere, such attention is "the raw material of moral sentiment" (*Essays* 270).

Eliot's appeal to the implications of a fundamental feature of agency is characteristic of the constitutivist approach to metaethics. The approach is perhaps best understood via

David Velleman's illuminating analogy to chess.[268] Should someone start regularly breaking the rules, "moving his pieces around aimlessly, for example," Velleman explain that "he will in effect have quit the game: his opponent will say, not just "You're letting me win," but "You're not playing any more" (720). The point here is that the rules are constitutive features of playing the game: someone who is inclined not to follow the rules cannot do so without also abandoning the activity.

Now, of course, not every one has the inclination to be a chess player; this is to say that the relevant feature of agency is not fundamental, and thus the rules for chess-playing do not obtain on every one. Velleman suggests, however, that there is an inclination everyone does have: namely, to be a unified self—or, more simply, to be in conscious control of one's behavior (719). That conscious control requires a unified self might seem dubious; Velleman explains:

> To act for a reason is to do what would make sense, where the consideration in light of which it would make sense is the reason for acting. Thus, for example, one's being interested in jazz would explain why one might frequent nightclubs, and so one can frequent nightclubs not only out of an interest in jazz but also on the grounds of that interest, regarded as explanatory of one's behavior. When one's behavior is guided by such considerations, it is guided by one's capacity for making sense of behavior, which is one's causal understanding and is therefore presented in reflexive guise to that very understanding, as the self that causes one's behavior. [269]

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[268] David Velleman, "The Possibility of Practical Reasoning." *Ethics* 106.4 (July 1996): 694-726, 712-713. Further citations marked "Possibility" and included parenthetically in the text.
[269] "Introduction," 8. *Self to Self: 1-15.*

Velleman's point here is that be conscious and in control of an action is to do it for a reason. This reason, however, is just one's sense of causal facts: it is the recognition of a "consideration" that would explain one's behavior. Since an interest in jazz would explain why a person often went to clubs, acting for a reason in this case involves conceiving of oneself as interested in jazz and as going out *on the basis of* that fact. In this way, the action becomes autonomous.

Significantly, however, by appealing to reason in this way, autonomy requires appeal to features beyond the self. Velleman explains that, on Kant's view, "In order to be a person, you must have an approach to the world that is sufficiently coherent and constant to qualify as a single continuing point-of-view. And part of what gives you a single continuing point-of-view is your acceptance of particular considerations as having the force of reasons whenever they are true."[270] Agents cannot, in other words, decide that a given consideration gives them a reason to act in one situation and not in another, all other things being equal; to do so is to prevent the self from achieving the unity that lets an agent make sense of herself. In this appeal to a broader perspective, however, the agent necessarily imagines the perspectives of others: "Kant thought that our rationality gives us a glimpse of—and hence an aspiration toward—a perspective even more inclusive than that of our persisting individual selves. Rational creatures have access to a shared perspective" ("Kantian Ethics" 25).

In Korsgaard's phrase, the need for consideration of this shared perspective stems from the fact that reasons are public. She describes the "publicity of reasons" thesis thus:

> The reasons that you legislate when you will have to be public, that is, have to have normative force that can be shared by all rational beings, because

[270] "A Brief Introduction to Kantian Ethics," 22. *Self to Self*:16-44. Further citations marked "Kantian Ethics" and included parenthetically in the text.

> acting is interacting with yourself—yourself at other times or in other possible situations. You have to make laws for yourself. And unless the laws that you make now bind you at other times and in other situations, and unless the laws that you know you would make at other times and in other situations bind you now, they won't hold you together into a unit after all" (SC 214).

The key point here, which highlights the difference between the constitutivist approach and Sidgwick's, is the notion that action is "interacting with yourself." The idea is to compare the relationship I have with myself to the relationship I have with others. And Korsgaard's strategy is to argue that unless the laws I act on bind my future self (in which case I am prudent) and are also laws that any rational being could act on (in which case I am moral), they "won't hold [me] together into a unit after all," which is to say that they won't actually constitute me as a self.

It is in this appeal to publicity that a further resonance with Eliot's account emerges. The "love of approbation," of course, is necessarily intersubjective, and thus requires appeal to the perspectives of other people. But what Eliot seems to imagine is that agents internalize these perspectives, becoming conscious of their "dependence" on others; this is a fact that, in Eliot's words, "checks" their egoistic desires. In this way, a purely social phenomenon becomes a capacity—namely, sympathy.

How does this serve to bind together the self, on Eliot's view? Her account of such self-construction is not obvious, but it emerges, I think, when we read her narratives with an eye toward what it is the agents she depicts want approval for: namely, their reasons. This point echoes the argument from the last chapter that reasons, for Eliot, bind the self together. Let us recall the key passage from *Scenes of Clerical Life:*

> [Evangelicalism produced] that idea of duty, that recognition of something to be lived for beyond the mere satisfaction of self, which is to the moral life what the addition of a great central ganglion is to animal life. No man can begin to mold himself on a faith or an idea without rising to a higher order of experience: a principle of subordination, of self-mastery, has been introduced into his nature; he is no longer a mere bundle of impressions, desires, and impulses […] The first condition of human goodness is something to love; the second, something to reverence (320).

In the last chapter, I read this passage as describing merely Eliot's moral psychology, insofar as it indicates the psychological features that make practical identities and conceptions of the good necessary. But as the phrase "condition of human goodness" might suggest, the passage might also be taking as describing the foundations of ethics—indeed, as describing the foundations of ethics precisely by describing the moral psychology of the logic of agency. Of course, what Eliot is describing here is the process of self-constitution: the way the ability to act on a reason can create a self out of mere animal desire.

Eliot's last phrase—that there are two conditions to goodness—is provocative. It is my sense that—as metaethical claims—they are inextricably interrelated. First, to reverence something is to see it as capable of generating reasons. But, as Eliot's account of the love of approbation suggests, for something to be reasonable is just for it to have the warrant of the perspective one shares with others. This is to say that the attention to other persons essentially involved in love is necessarily also a feature in reverencing, since deeming something worthy of reverence requires regarding it from the stance outside oneself.

Understanding the attention to others and the capacity to act for reasons as inextricably linked gains support from Eliot's narratives of developing egoists, which are

fundamentally intersubjective, depending on an intimate relationship with another person. Andrew Miller has suggested that Victorian moral thought placed a heavy role on the idea of moral exemplars and their usefulness in enabling moral improvement; as a result of one's "openness to example" and "responsive, unpredictable engagements with other people," it becomes possible to appreciate the character of others and model one's own after it (*Burdens* 3). George Eliot's narratives of developing egoists offer him a clear example—as he puts it, "Gwendolen Harleth is blind to her life's possibilities, and blind even to that blindness, until she encounters Daniel Deronda" (7). Such exemplars model a number of praiseworthy moral traits for Miller: for instance, they engage in "attentive and scrupulous self-reflection" that is attentive "to the distinctive features" of a given situation (99). If I understand his view correctly, they also model the correct orchestration of moral perspectives: by neither taking the first-person perspective with its tendency towards egoism nor the third-person perspective and its threat of skepticism, the moral exemplar selectively sees himself in the ideal second-person way (74). The exemplar thus views his actions from outside himself, but not from a de-personalized stance; rather, it is concretely realized in the stance of the "you." In his reading of *Daniel Deronda*, this sort of "second person engagement" is what "the novel has urged upon" Gwendolen (79).[271]

It seems to me Miller is right to think of Deronda as an exemplar, and moreover to see the exemplarity as consisting in part in a certain perspective one takes on oneself. I hesitate, however, to say that this perspective is so clearly second-personal. In modeling the sympathetic consideration of other people, Eliot's exemplars seem to me to embody the

[271] I confess that I am not quite sure how to understand Miller on this point; he elsewhere sees Deronda as mistakenly accepting a "generalized third-person perspective," against which Mirah recognizes the importance of the first person view (71). But surely the person who has done the most "urging" of moral views on Gwendolen is Deronda, so Miller seems to be suggesting that Deronda urges the need for second-person relations on Gwendolen while simultaneously failing properly orchestrate perspectives himself. And it seems odd to speak of the "novel" as urging anything on Gwendolen, if this is supposed to mean anything other than views the exemplar Daniel suggests to her.

publicity of reasons: while Eliot crucially conceives this perspective in the affective terms of sympathy, nevertheless the stance seems importantly third-personal.[272] In scenes of sympathetic "awakening," Eliot's egoists crucially become aware that their reasons are deemed unworthy from the perspective of some other person; their need for approval from this perspective—that of the exemplar initially, but ultimately the stance of sympathy—is the fundamental cause of subsequent moral growth. Eliot's exemplars thus impose a test on reforming egoists, requiring their reasons, in the form of their developing practical identities, to conform to the features Korsgaard, Velleman, and Kant think of as constitutive of rationality: namely, that they can be willed from perspectives outside that of a limited selfishness. Success in this development results in both self-unification, in the form of the achievement of identity, and, not coincidentally, love. This feature of the marriage plot emblematizes formally the philosophical claim: since reasons must be public, genuine agency requires internalizing the need for consideration of the perspectives of other people.[273]

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[272] I do not want to overstate this disagreement, however, which might seem to touch on the complexities of reflective distance central to the analyses of Anderson and Levine. Whatever the right way to characterize the nature of the shared perspective turns out to be—whether it is second-personal, dependent on cultivated detachment, or some other form of selflessness—it will nevertheless play the same metaethical role, in suggesting that the only identities which can in fact constitute selves are those which pass an evaluative test from the shared perspective.

[273] To the extent that there is a critical conversation regarding Eliot's views regarding the foundations of ethics, I take my interpretation to be a revision of the current consensus. Suzy Anger claims that Eliot is an "objectivist" and an "intuitionist": she asserts that Eliot is "In her view, there are moral facts, which are not independent of humans, but objective all the same, and these can be known through intuition." "George Eliot and Philosophy," *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, 80. Valerie Wainwright also sees Eliot as committed to the objectivity of ethical truths, but this is because of the necessity of moral behavior for a certain kind of happiness; as Wainwright puts it, "Eliot's vision of what it is good to be involves considerations as to what makes a life cohere and hence contributes to a state of flourishing […] In other words, built into the foundations of her definition of a good life is the requirement that good be achieved in an integrated way" (*Ethics and the English Novel,* 124-25). The approach I am recommending here is closest to T. H. Irwin's interpretation, which also sees Eliot as assuming a "constitutive" approach at various moments ("Sympathy and the Basis of Morality," 283). Moreover, I am following his suggestion that it is possible to "allow our moral psychology and epistemology to determine the metaphysics of morality," at least in interpreting Eliot. However, I think he means something rather different than I do: for Irwin, the claim is that one's sympathetic moral reactions just are "constitutive" of morality; they are not merely "indicative" of deeper moral truths. As is perhaps clear, I think it is a mistake to see the primary metaethical role of sympathy as appearing in one's instinctive reactions; it seems much more significant as an element in self-constitution.

Eliot's first depiction of this sort of egoist occurs in *Felix Holt.* Esther Lyon begins the novel convinced of her superiority over her immediately surrounding society; the narrator notes, "She was well satisfied with herself for her fastidious taste, never doubting that hers was the highest standard. She was proud that the best-born and handsomest girls at school had always said she might be taken for a born lady."[274] This emerges particularly in her fashion: "she felt that it was her superiority which made her unable to use without disgust any but the finest cambric handkerchiefs and freshest gloves" (77). However, in the first meeting, Felix Holt disapproves of her: he catches her reading Byron, and informs her that his writings are not worthy of her, since Byron is a "misanthropic debauchee" (69).

This critique proves deeply disconcerting to Esther: Felix has not reacted the way he should. Indeed, "Felix ought properly to have been a little in love with her," a passage in free indirect discourse suggests, but "it was quite clear that, instead of feeling any disadvantage on his own side, he held himself to be immeasurably her superior; and, what was worse, Esther had a secret consciousness that he was her superior. She was all the more vexed at the suspicion that he thought slightly of her; and wished in her vexation at that she could have found more fault with him" (120). Now there is nothing here, yet, that represents genuine sympathy or respect; Esther has not yet abandoned her egoism. However, the narrator portrays Esther registering the key fact of Felix's disapproval in her suspicion that he thinks "slightly of her." Moreover, a second feature of the process of emergence from egoism appears: it is crucial that Esther thinks Felix might be superior to her. She does not know this for certain, but her suspicion that he might be so prevents her from immediately rejecting his criticism.

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[274] George Eliot, *Felix Holt: The Radical* (New York: Penguin, 1995. First published 1868): 77. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

This process takes a second step when Felix comes to the Lyon house to urge Esther to become a better person: specifically, he wants to persuade her that her preference for good taste over right opinions is "shallow stuff," and more generally to do something "better" than care about fashion and popular romances. Felix's disapproval is deeply troubling for Esther:

> For the first time in her life Esther felt herself seriously shaken in her self-contentment. She knew there was a mind to which she appeared trivial, narrow, selfish. Every word Felix had said to her seemed to have burnt itself into her memory. She felt as if she should forevermore be haunted by self-criticism, and never do anything to satisfy those fancies on which she had simply piqued herself before without being dogged by inward questions. (125)

The narrator's registration of the significance of this event is key. Here, Felix's disapproval produces the first genuine disturbance to the "self-contentment" Esther had previously always enjoyed. And it is important to note that it is simply Felix's disapproval that causes it: it is Esther's knowledge that there is a "mind to which she appear[s] trivial, narrow, selfish" that "shakes" her self-conception. This leads to a new kind of reflection and evaluation, as Esther feels the birth of what she calls "self-criticism": Esther is contemplating her reasons from the perspective of others, and finding them wanting. Before this moment, she has "simply piqued" herself, but this is no longer sufficient, since Felix drives her to question herself. Eliot thus implies here something like the following process: egoists require self-approval, and egoistic self-approval in turn requires the approval of everyone the egoist encounters. As "The Moral Sense" made clear, the "love of approbation" eventually turns the "respect of fellow-men" into habit; thus the need for approval eventually gives rise to moral awakening, and Esther's newfound self-criticism shows something very much like this.

Importantly, however, the narrator also explains why this rupture has not happened earlier:

> Her father's desire for her conversion had never moved her; she saw that he adored her all the while, and he never checked her unregenerate acts as if they degraded her on earth, but only mourned over them as unfitting her for heaven. Unfitness for heaven […] did not attack her self-respect and self-satisfaction. But now she had been stung—stung even into a new consciousness concerning her father. Was it true that his life was so much worthier than her own? She could not change for anything Felix said, but she told herself he was mistaken if he supposed her incapable of generous thoughts. (125-6).

Here, it is possible to discern why her father's criticisms have never had the effect on Esther that Felix's do: her father never in fact disapproved of her. Instead, he "adored her all the while," and did not portray her actions as "degrading her on earth." What is more, the passage also reveals the new efficacy of Esther's moral awareness; while refusing to respond to Felix directly, she responds to his criticism almost as if it was a dare, telling herself that she will have "generous thoughts" if for no other reason than to prove Felix wrong.

Indeed, she has an immediate opportunity for proving these generous thoughts: when the narrative next returns to Esther, she does a minor task for her father—getting his porridge (153). He is touched and grateful, and says so; in return, Esther says that though she has not been good to him, she will be in the future (154). The narrator explains the significance of these events:

> Very slight words and deeds may have a sacramental efficacy, if we can cast our self-love behind us, in order to say or do them. And it has been well believed through many ages that the beginning of compunction is the beginning of a new life, that the

> mind which sees itself blameless may well be called dead in trespasses—in trespasses on the love of others, in trespasses on their weakness, in trespasses on all those great claims which are the image of our own need. (154)

Here, the narrator makes the philosophical view explicit; in casting behind her "self-love," Esther has begun moving beyond her egoism into a sympathetic awareness of others. And the narrator again links it crucially with negative self-evaluation—in the text's terms, "compunction." The link between the lack of compunction and immoral action appears as well, insofar as "the mind which sees itself as blameless" becomes incapable of recognizing a whole series of sins, in the form of "trespasses" against others.

Esther's subsequent development involves the intertwining of two related psychological processes: she develops a practical identity and begins to recognize intrinsically valuable ends for action; correspondingly, she internalizes the perspectives of others and develops the ability to view her own reasons from outside her limited perspective. Her practical identity emerges first in her interest in Felix's politics. The narrator represents her consciousness thus: "She knew that Felix cared earnestly for all pubic questions, and she supposed that he held it one of her deficiencies not to care about them: well, she would try to learn the secret of this ardour, which was so strong in him that it animated what she thought the dullest form of life" (194). What is significant here is the way Felix figures as an embodiment of which projects are worth caring about. In this way, he is a guide to the reasonableness of an end.

Moreover, the slight irony the narrator registers in Esther's defiant tone—that she is doing this partly just to show Felix she can—drops out entirely in Esther's subsequent development:

> But now she had known Felix, her conception of what a happy love must be had become like a dissolving view, in which the once-clear images were gradually melting into new forms and new colors. The favourite Byronic heroes were beginning to look something like last night's decorations seen in the sober dawn. […] Behind all Esther's thoughts, like an unacknowledged yet constraining presence, there was the sense, that if Felix Holt were to love her, her life would be exalted into something quite new—into a sort of difficult blessedness, such as one may imagine in beings who are conscious of painfully growing into the possession of higher powers. (228)

This passage makes obvious the way Felix's exemplarity has broken up Esther's self-conception, forcing her to refigure it into a genuine practical identity—one which, in positing rewarding but difficult tasks, appeals to her "higher powers" and offers a sort of "blessedness." Correspondingly, her old beliefs about what goals were worth pursuing disappear, dismissed as the embodiments of selfish desire. Felix is crucially figured as "constraining" Esther, and his function as the test of the validity of the identity explains why. As a later passage puts it, "He was like no one else to her: he had seemed to bring a law, and the love that gave strength to obey the law" (265). Under the Kantian reading I am offering here, there is a very real sense in which the law is precisely what Felix has brought: the law that requires one act in such a way as to treat others as ends in themselves, and to develop an identity that accords with this principle.

Alongside this formation of identity, Esther increasingly becomes capable of seeing herself from a distance. "The consciousness of her own superiority amongst the people around her was superseded," the narrator explains, and "even a few brief weeks" had given "self-doubt to her manners" (238). Similarly, her developing relationship with Felix "had

taught her to doubt the infallibility of her own standard, and raised a presentiment of moral depths that were hidden from her" (252). In this way, Esther acquires the key moral capacity to sympathize with other people: reversing the automatic self-assuredness with which she began the novel, Esther internalizes the rational capacity initially figured in Felix. Of course, as the constitutivist approach makes clear, it is not an accident that Esther stabilizes her identity while learning how to recognize other perspectives on her actions: indeed, it is only by establishing the kinds of reasons that one could sympathize with that she is able to bind herself together.

Esther's development culminates, finally, in a series of morally praiseworthy actions that demonstrate her moral growth—she visits Felix in prison, testifies at his trial, and gives up her inheritance in the Transome estate after offering Mrs. Transome some essential sympathy. The role of her new identity in causing her final benevolent actions appears in the narrator's representation of her final choice between marriage to Harold Transome and Felix:

> There was something which she now felt profoundly to be the best thing that life could give her. Bur—if it was to be had at all—it was not to be had without paying a heavy price for it, such as we must pay for all that is greatly good. A supreme love, a motive that gives a sublime rhythm to a woman's life, is not to be had where and how she wills […] It is not true that love makes all things easy: it makes us choose what is difficult (464).

The narrator here is at pains to show that Esther's decision to marry Felix does not represent the choice of desire. It is instead very much an action against selfish inclinations, one requiring significant suffering, in pursuit of an end that Esther has come to see as "the best thing that life could give her." The alternative, marriage to Transome, represents the

meaningless life of ease: "on the other side there was a lot where everything seemed easy, but for the fatal absence of those feelings which […] it seemed nothing less than a fall and degradation to do without" (465). Significantly, Esther imagines this life as one involving little activity: it would be "silken bondage that arrested all motive" (465). The notion of motive emphasizes the importance of intrinsic ends; without projects to work for, Esther will lose her genuine reasons, and will return to the mere satisfaction of desire with which her early egoism was consumed.

Eliot returns to this process with a fuller description in the Gwendolen Harleth narrative in *Daniel Deronda*. Gwendolen is perhaps the prototypical egoist in Eliot's fiction, her act of kissing herself in the mirror emblematizing the nature of egoistic psychology (18). However, the seeds of the impulse that will eventually lead to the awakening of her sympathy are already present at the beginning of the novel. She has been gambling, and notices at a distance Daniel Deronda, who appears to have what she terms an "ironic" look. Moreover, when she pawns a necklace to get more funds, he returns it to her anonymously, an act that Gwendolen views suspiciously:

> He knew very well that he was entangling her in helpless humiliation: it was another way of smiling at her ironically, and taking the air of a supercilious mentor. Gwendolen felt the bitter tears of mortification rising and rolling down her cheeks. No one had ever before dared to treat her with irony and contempt (16)

What is crucial here is Gwendolen's sense that Deronda does not view her actions the way she does—which is to say, he does not share her approving description of them. Like Esther, Gwendolen is not immediately compelled to accept Deronda's description. Nevertheless, she is in some way traumatized by it—as the narrator notes, no one had ever judged her actions in this way before. She has been deemed, crucially, to be acting on bad

reasons, and the fact that someone views her this way is humiliating. This trauma, again, is the crucial first step in Eliot's theory of moral development.

A second crucial step in Gwendolen's moral development comes in her encounter with the musician Herr Klesmer, who, after hearing her play, offers a complimentary but nevertheless penetratingly critical analysis. Gwendolen is of course taken aback, but is saved when the host of the party asks Klesmer himself to play. The narrator then remarks:

> Herr Klesmer played a composition of his own, a fantasia called *Freudvoll, Leidvoll, Gedankenvoll* […] Gwendolen, in spite of her wounded egoism, had fullness of nature enough to feel the power of this playing, and it gradually turned her inward sob of mortification into an excitement which lifted her for the moment into a desperate indifference about her own doings, or at least a determination to get a superiority over them by laughing at them as if they belonged to somebody else. (43)

Here, of course, the crucial step is the fact that Klesmer forces Gwendolen to laugh at her own musical performances "as if they belonged to somebody else," which is to say that he forces her into the development of the self-evaluation that proved crucial for Esther. It might at first seem that this is happening in quite a different way; after all, Klesmer is not criticizing Gwendolen in the way Deronda did. But there is a parallel: Klesmer's musical ability is what requires her to accept his criticism of her musical ability. Having deemed music worth pursuing, she finds herself committed to recognizing Klesmer's superior ability; this is the sense in which her nature is "full." But a corollary of recognizing this ability is the fact that it earns Klesmer the status of a critic she must respect, in a way structurally similar to Esther's attention to Felix's criticism upon recognizing him as "superior."

Gwendolen's self-evaluation emerges again as a moral force in her second significant encounter with Klesmer, when—her family suddenly being impoverished—she appeals to

him in hopes of starting a career as a musician or an actress. He, however, crushes her by explaining that the path to a rewarding and financially viable career as an artist is impossibly hard. Gwendolen, though devastated, is able to behave well. The narrator explains:

> When [Klesmer] had taken up his hat and was going to make his bow, Gwendolen's better self, conscious of an ingratitude which the clear-seeing Klesmer must have penetrated, made a desperate effort to find its way above the stifling layers of egoistic disappointment and irritation. Looking at him with a glance of the old gayety, she put out her hand, and said with a smile, "If I take the wrong road, it will not be because of your flattery" (243).

This is the first moment in the novel when Gwendolen's emerging sympathetic self is able to act—or, more precisely, to cause Gwendolen to act—insofar as she is able to imagine how someone else perceives the world. It is revealing that it occurs in an encounter with Klesmer, since her first encounter with him saw a similar act of self-distancing.

The effects of this self-evaluation continue to emerge, appearing in her second encounter with Deronda. She finds herself wondering what he thinks of her, and the narrator remarks: "These questions ran in her mind as the voice of an uneasy longing to be judged by Deronda with unmixed admiration—a longing which had had its seed in her first resentment at his critical glance" (304). This, of course, reveals that a crucial step has been made. Gwendolen has ceased questioning Deronda's description of her actions, and now accepts them as accurate and Deronda's evaluations generally as worth caring about: in this way, she begins to posit Deronda's opinion as a test for the worthiness of her actions. The narrator's suggestion that this response grew out of her resentment alludes, importantly, to the fact that no one had criticized her actions in a way that imposed itself on her before Deronda did: part of the reason she wants his admiration is that she did not know before she

met him that it was possible to do anything other than admire her. As such, her reflective capacity had never, properly speaking, been engaged.

More evidence of Gwendolen's emerging sympathy comes soon after. After learning that Deronda could be an illegitimate son of Sir Hugo Mallinger, and thus might have been in a position—as potentially Sir Hugo's heir—to be as rich as Henleigh Grandcourt, whose wealth has convinced her to accept his marriage proposal, Gwendolen wonders about what Daniel's life would have been like. The narrator describes her reflections thus:

> These obvious, futile thoughts of what might have been, made a new epoch for Gwendolen. She, whose unquestionable habit it had been to take the best that came to her for less than her own claim, had now to see the position which tempted her in a new light, as a hard, unfair exclusion of others. What she had now heard about Deronda seemed to her imagination to throw him into one group with Mrs. Glasher and her children; before whom she felt herself in an attitude of apology—she who had hitherto been surrounded by a group that in her opinion had need be apologetic to her. Perhaps Deronda himself was thinking of these things. Could he know of Mrs. Glasher? If he knew that she knew, he would despise her; but he could have no such knowledge. Would he, without that, despise her for marrying Grandcourt? His possible judgment of her actions was telling on her as importunately as Klesmer's judgment of her powers. (307)

The passage is significant for several reasons. First, it is worth noting that it explicitly connects Klesmer's judgment with Deronda's, and it is clear why: both have been instrumental in driving Gwendolen out of egoism. Moreover, she has experienced an epistemological shift: rather than seeing her rise to wealth in becoming Grandcourt's wife as an unqualified success story, Gwendolen now sees it "in a new light, as a hard, unfair

exclusion of others." The narrator makes this shift explicit by drawing a contrast to her previous beliefs, which, much like Esther's initial egoistic attitude, has been to "take the best that came to her for less than her own claim," and to think of herself as "surrounded by a group that in her opinion had need to be apologetic to her," rather than as someone who might need to apologize to others. Indeed, as in *Felix Holt*, the narrator is quite clear about the revolutionary nature of this change: it constitutes a "new epoch" in Gwendolen's life.

As with Esther, Gwendolen subsequently develops her sympathy by internalizing Deronda's perspective. Because he "impressed her as being not her admirer but her superior," the narrator explains, "in some mysterious way he was becoming part of her conscience" (415). "An uneasy, transforming process" has spoiled her old hope and pleasures, and left her not longer "inclined to kiss her fortunate image in the glass" (423). This internalization does not proceed quite as rapidly in Gwendolen's case as it does in Esther's; indeed, the narrator is more interested in delineating the stages. Thus, for instance, one passage describing "the transforming influence of the thoughts we imagine to be going in another" explains that "a suspicion of dissent or disapproval" can change a person, "even when the grounds of disapproval are but a matter of searching conjecture" (423). The point here, I take it, is that Gwendolen recognizes Daniel's disapproval of her actions without quite understanding why he disapproves, or what sorts of projects she should undertake in the future.

In this way, Gwendolen's sympathetic development does not proceed as far as Esther's: it is significant that Esther ends *Felix Holt* by demonstrating her capacity for sympathy with Mrs. Transome, while Gwendolen ends *Daniel Deronda* still relying on Daniel's perspective. "She had learned to see all her acts through the impression they would make on Deronda," and he forms an "outer conscience" for her (673; 763). Nevertheless, she has

internalized it to the point that she has some sense of the criteria Daniel invokes: though her remorse after Grandcourt's death is in some ways irrational, nevertheless it is "the precious sign of a recoverable nature; [her remorse] was the culmination of that self-disapproval which had been the awakening of a new life within her; it marked her off from the criminals whose only regret is failure in securing their evil wish" (696-697). The point, I take it, is that while Gwendolen's development of deliberative sympathy is not quite complete—there is no need to view herself as critically as she does—her regret demonstrates a significant step in the form of a kind of self-criticism on the basis of the interests of others (as opposed to the self-criticism of the criminal, who only regrets that he did not get what he wanted).

Correspondingly, Gwendolen's achievement of a practical identity is also delayed: rather than realizing a state with clearly defined projects and a stable self, she ends the novel having recognized the need for such an identity. As we saw in the last chapter, part of Daniel's advice to Gwendolen is that she find something to care about outside of herself; he explains further: "The refuge you are needing from personal trouble is the higher, the religious life, which holds an enthusiasm for something more than our own appetites and vanities" (451). Significantly, in his advice, Daniel explicitly links the need for such a higher life with the achievement of sympathy. He diagnoses her "want of ideas and sympathies," and suggests that Gwendolen's suffering has had the value of making her "conscious of more beyond the round of your own inclinations" (452). This link has a counterintuitive air about it—after all, as Daniel's own narrative makes clear, sometimes the sympathetic perspective actively prevents an agent from reaching the "higher, religious life." On a constitutivist reading, however, the link is natural: to achieve an identity that can bind the self just is to act on reasons that can be willed from a broader perspective, which is just the view of oneself from the perspective one shares with others. The end of *Daniel Deronda*

figures this dynamic in the penultimate conversation between Gwendolen and Deronda, when she explains, "I want to be good—not like what I have been," and asks Daniel, "What else shall I do?" (767; 768). It is precisely because Daniel, in his sympathetic capacity, represents the stance of valid reasons that he is the only one capable of answering Gwendolen's question meaningfully.

Now, there is a deep problem with the constitutivist account of normativity: it is the explanation of bad action. On the constitutivist way of thinking about metaethics, to act morally just is to act in a way that constitutes oneself as an agent. But this would seem to suggest that no one ever really *acts* immorally; when someone does something evil, they are not behaving as an agent. This problem has two dimensions: it is, first of all, just a question about what immoral action is—how we are to understand the psychology lying behind such deliberation. As Korsgaard articulates the problem, it might at first seem that "only good action really is action, and that there is nothing left for bad action to be" (SC 160). This is of course a descendant of an old problem with Kant, who seems on first blush to hold that bad actions are always heteronomous, since good actions just are fully autonomous actions (SC 159-60). Second, it is a question about moral responsibility: if we are only responsible for those things we do as agents—for our actions, as opposed to the uncontrolled movements of our body—then it might seem no one could be held responsible for acting badly.

The problem of evil agency is not one Eliot imagines with great depth; many of her representations of it do not indicate recognition of this issue. Most of her villains—Arthur Donnithorne, Tito Melema, Savonarola, Nicholas Bulstrode—arrive at villainy through clear failures of agency—they are self-deceived or weak or both, and thus do not challenge the constitutivist assumption that full agency will necessarily be moral. It is a credit to Eliot's philosophical honesty, I think, that *Daniel Deronda* turns to Henleigh Grandcourt, whose self-

conscious sadism points to precisely the problem evil action presents to thinkers like Korsgaard and Kant. It seems obvious that Grandcourt is self-controlled, with a unified self, yet clearly his practical identity is malicious, obviously not capable of being willed from a shared perspective. According to the constitutivist, however, such an agent is impossible.

The defense that is required, then, involves explaining how agents like Grandcourt can appear to be fully self-constituted without actually being so. Korsgaard borrows in this light from Plato's account of the various kinds of misguided constitutions for a city. One particularly significant improper constitution is rule by the "tyrannical soul"; Korsgaard explains: "In a horrifying imitation of the unity and simplicity that characterize justice […] the tyrannical soul is governed by some nightmarish erotic desire, which subordinates the entire soul to its purposes, leaving the person an absolute slave to a single dominating obsession" (169-70). As opposed to evil as weakness—a person slipping, driven by a wanton appetite—the tyrant imagines evil as single-minded, unconstrained by the moral restrictions that bind the weak. The task is to explain how this is not agency. Korsgaard explains:

> The tyrannical person does not really choose actions […] [because he] doesn't choose *an act for the sake of an end*, the whole package as something worth doing. There's one end […] or act that he is going to pursue or do *no matter what*, and it rules him. And for him that end makes anything worth doing, anything at all, and that's a fact that is settled in advance of reflection […] As I imagine the tyrant, his relation to his obsession is like a psychotic's relation to his delusion: he is prepared to organize everything else around it, even at the expense of a loss of his grip on reality, on the world. (SC 172)

The point is that the tyrant is not actually choosing acts to perform, but is rather driven by a single overwhelming desire; given that this is the case, his actions are not representative of

full agency: "the tyrannized soul can never separate himself from *one* of his impulses" (SC 173). To the extent that evil can plausibly be represented this way, accounts like Korsgaard's gain an important support, for otherwise the constitutivist view simply seems naive about the possibilities of malicious action.

Eliot touches on these issues at a few points in her representation of Grandcourt: it is significant, for instance, that he is both lazy and desultory in action; as Lush notes, it is unpredictable when and if Grandcourt will do something.[275] But *Daniel Deronda* is really less interested in Grandcourt's psychology than it is in Daniel's and Gwendolen's, and thus the philosophical problem Grandcourt represents goes somewhat neglected. However, this is precisely the issue that George Meredith takes up in his fiction, and particularly in *The Egoist*, to which I turn now.

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Eliot's thinking about the egoist's relation to the foundations of normativity emerges in stories of moral growth: by showing what happens as such protagonists develop, she suggests what it was they lacked in the first place. Although George Meredith does occasionally represent a growth out of egoism, generally his narratives are bleaker.[276] Characters are less likely to escape egoism than to suffer the consequences of it. His thinking about normativity and the self thus emerges somewhat differently: it is his technique to

[275] As Lush thinks at one point, "there was no telling what might turn up in the slowly-turning chances of [Grandcourt's] mind" (157).

[276] A proof of this claim emerges somewhat ironically in John Halperin's *Egoism and Self-Discovery* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1974). As a result of the book's guiding interest in narratives of moral development, Halperin searches for stories of the "protagonist's moral education" (202). This means, he says, that *The Egoist*, is not an ideal source; since "there is no self-discovery the moral process I have been attempting to define in these novels is for [Willoughby] incomplete." Thus he turns to *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*; as the story of a progression from "total self-blindness" to "self-knowledge." However, the end of the novel, which sees the death of Richard's wife as a result of his egoism, is hardly positive. In Halperin's gloss: "He has finally understood the world and himself; he is no longer proud and self-indulgent. Physically, at least, he has survived his ordeal. But emotionally Richard is dead, a victim of the completeness of his moral education" (214). If this is the best example from Meredith of a successful growth out of egoism, I take that to indicate how rare Meredith thinks it is.

correlate different breakdowns in rational agency, and show how they both cause and are caused by other failures. *The Egoist* is exemplary in this regard: it shows in particular how Sir Willoughby's continual frustration of his own goals arises from heteronomy; as Meredith demonstrates, this failure is inextricably interrelated with his disregard for others. To draw out these interrelations, the first movement of my reading will show how Sir Willoughby fails to control himself: far from calculating which actions are in his own best interest, at a number of crucial moments in the plot of the novel he acts on the basis of desires he has not reflectively endorsed or incorporated into his self-conception. In this context, I'll suggest that Sir Willoughby is driven by desire in a way very similar to Korsgaard's tyrant. The second will show how this inability to integrate himself produces his complex perception of other people: starting from the peculiar fact of Willoughby's sensitivity to the perspectives of others, I'll work through the way Willoughby combines blindness to the reasons of others with manipulation of them. The final section will bring together these two threads, showing a deep hypocrisy—a fact that suggests a fundamental tension in his practical identity—in the demand for "reasons" Willoughby places on Clara; the nature of this demand, I will argue, epitomizes the egoistic conception of reasons as obstacles.

To start with Willoughby's self-conception, he sees himself as the epitome of an honorable noble, preserving the remnants of an older, better culture. He is not subtle about this, remarking to Clara Middleton, "Feudalism is not an objectionable thing if you can be sure of the lord."[277] And this is just as importantly an ethical ideal as it is a social, political, and economic one. Thus, Willoughby tells Laetitia Dale at one point, "I am governed by principles. Convince me of an error, I shall not obstinately pursue a premeditated course." (322). This is to say Willoughby sees himself as thoroughly self-controlled—principled, as

[277] *The Egoist*, ed. Robert M. Adams (New York: Norton, 1979): 70. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

one might say; he certainly thinks of himself as having a rich practical identity that posits clear goals and structures the world in a value-laden way.

Willoughby's insistence that he is "governed by principles" renders it ironic, comic, and philosophically significant that he is in fact completely heteronomous: in both small decisions and large, he finds himself driven to act against his principles and resolutions by wayward impulses. And Meredith is at pains to show this heteronomy from the very beginning of the novel: it is the presence of rivals that drives him to declare affection as a young man (13), and further it is jealousy of her suitors that causes him to propose to Constantia Durham (17); similarly, the narrator explains that it is the "pack" of rivals initially around Clara Middleton, combined with her graciousness to all of them, that hurries "him with all his might into the heat of the chase while yet he knew no more of her than that he was competing for a prize and Willoughby Patterne only one of dozens to the young lady" (33). Thus, even before the reader knows very much about how Sir Willoughby sees himself, Meredith has shown how he is in fact driven by impulses like jealousy. As David Foster puts the point, Willoughby's mind "wars with itself, lacking the consistency of intention and the stability of principle that Sidgwick defines as characteristic of the rational person (545).

A number of the major plot movements of the story show Willoughby similarly driven by impulse and lacking in reflective self-control. To take one example, after perceiving that she doesn't love him, Willoughby decides to continue his engagement with Clara because this is the best way to punish her: "Determination not to let her go […] There was his vengeance" (186). More substantially, the narrator explains:

> Jealousy […] the fieriest trial of our egoism, worked in the Egoist to produce division of himself from himself, a concentration of his thoughts upon another object, still himself, but in another breast, which had to be looked at and into for the

> discovery of him. By the gaping jaw-chasm of his greed we may gather comprehension of his insatiate force of jealousy. Let her go? Not though he were to become a mark of public scorn in strangling her with the yoke! His concentration was marvelous. Unused to the exercise of imaginative powers, he nevertheless conjured her before him visually till his eyeballs ached. He saw none but Clara, hated none, loved none, save the intolerable woman. (190)

Notable here first is the way the impulse of jealousy completely redirects Willoughby's thoughts; drawing on largely "unused" imagination, he focuses on Clara to an astonishing degree, until he sees, loves, and hates nothing else. But perhaps more significant is the first part of the passage, where Meredith calls attention to the way such an impulse forces a "division" in the Egoist's self; susceptible as he is to such powerful impulses, Willoughby cannot hold himself together particularly well. Rather, his insistence that others reflect his attitudes towards them, an idea I will return to in a moment, requires the immediate abandonment of his current project and the subjugation of the new object.

The combination of Willoughby's beliefs about his principled nature with his profound heteronomy is made possible, of course, by his self-deception. Again, Meredith makes this vivid early in the novel. Sir Willoughby, hearing that a relative has become famous in the military, invites him to visit; however, when the man arrives and proves to be ugly and ungentlemanly, Willoughy refuses to see him and sends him away. Shortly after becoming engaged to Clara, Willoughby represents the scene thus: "Latterly I have invited Captain Patterne to visit me […] I sent him a special invitation. He thanked me and curtly declined" (70). Now admittedly, Willoughby is here lying to Clara rather than directly to himself. But he knows that Captain Patterne's son Crossjay—who has been asking why Sir Willoughby wouldn't see his father—is easily accessible to Clara; indeed, it was a

conversation about Crossjay that brought up the topic of his father. Moreover, Clara already knows the truth of the story from Crossjay, and thus that Willoughby is lying (60). So I am inclined to think that the more plausible interpretation is that Willoughby's arrogance has led him to actually believe that Captain Patterne declined the invitation, since Willoughby from his own perspective could never be the sort of man to so overtly dismiss a family member.

This interpretation gains some plausibility from recognizing how malleable Willoughby's beliefs in fact are. One example here is his perception of Laetitia Dale: having briefly decided to give up Clara (he will almost immediately change his mind again), he contemplates marrying Laetitia. The narrator explains: "He had come to the conclusion that it could be done, though the effort to harmonize the figure sitting near him, with the artistic figure of his purest pigments, had cost him labor and a blinking of the eyelids" (322); a few moments later, we learn that "the colors in which he painted her were too lively to last; the madness in his head threatened to subside" (328). The point here is that Sir Willoughby's perception of Laetitia's beauty and sexual attractiveness turns out to be easily manipulated; he can "harmonize" her with the "artistic figure" of his fantasy. Indeed, he is even capable of dimly manipulating his deception himself, insofar as he recognizes that his perception of Laetitia is not accurate and will change soon.

Now, it is worth emphasizing that the desires which cause Willoughby to act and which produce his self-deception are located in his sexual nature; it is not an accident that they are most powerfully manifested in the form of jealousy. This offers an important step in seeing the resonance between Meredith and Korsgaard, for it shows how Willoughby demonstrates the erotic obsession Korsgaard thinks is constitutive of the tyrant. The narrator makes this quite theoretically clear:

> Jealousy of a woman is the primitive egoism seeking to refine in a blood gone to savagery under apprehension of an invasion of rights; it is in action the tiger threatened by a rifle when his paw is rigid on quick flesh; he tears the flesh for rage at the intruder. The Egoist, who is our original male in giant form, had no bleeding victim beneath his paw, but there was the sex to mangle. (191)

This is a compelling passage for a number of reasons, but most important in this regard is the conceptual nexus the narrator draws between egoism, the male desire for sexual possession and dominance, and jealousy. When jealousy manifests, Meredith makes clear that this is the sign of a lower, more primitive self—the "original male" of the Egoist. This speaks to Meredith's broader evolutionary explanation of egoism; while the details of this view are not essential here, the broad point is—as Richard Hudson puts it—that egoism "is a demand of the animal, a holdover from Man's brutish past. It is the primitive desire of the animal for self-preservation."[278] This is to say that egoism represents the dominance of an older irrational part of the self. And this fits quite closely with Korsgaard's description of the "nightmarish erotic desire" of the tyrant, and indeed even with her example of the "serial sex killer, condemned to the eternal reenactment of some horrifying sexual scene" (SC 170-71).

Meredith's representation of Willoughby's consciousness subsequently dramatizes the erotic obsession constitutive of tyranny. There are a number of passages one might cite—Willoughby's many fantasies about how he will reduce Clara to shame in order to forgive her are relevant here—but a particularly vivid moment describes how Clara's timidity "had its bewitchingness: the girl's physical pride of stature scorning to bend under a load of conscious guilt, had a certain black-angel beauty for which he felt a hugging hatred" (236). The tensions here—between pride and timidity, black angel and beauty, and especially in

[278] "The Meaning of Egoism in George Meredith's *The Egoist*." *Trollopian* 3.3 (December 1948): 163-76, 167. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

hugging and hatred—capture the unintegrated inclinations constitutive of the tyrant. In David Foster's words, Willoughby's mind is "reactive rather than principled because it is always at the mercy of the egoistic appetites that control his mind and emotions alike" (547). And further, the link between obsession and eroticism implicit in the notion of a "hugging hatred" seems quite close to describing the attitude Korsgaard has in mind in speaking of the way a desire might tyrannize a soul.

Unsurprisingly, given the way he has constituted himself, Willoughby often fails to attain his goals when he does undertake to deliberate rationally. He is often guilty of what Kant sees as the primary cause of immoral action: making exceptions for oneself from generally accepted rules (SC 171). For instance, while contemplating how to punish Clara, he thinks: "He could do them [cruel treatments of her] well because of the faith he had in his renowned amiability; for in doing them, he could feel that he was other than he seemed, and his own cordial nature was there to comfort him while he bestowed punishment" (185). Here, Willoughby is quite comfortable maintaining a belief in his "own cordial nature" while treating Clara cruelly, and we see how: he makes a distinction between the way he really is and the way he "seems." These sort of failures lead not merely to disrespect for others, but also lead him astray in pursuit of his ends. In his one real instance of careful deliberation—the combination of "policy and temper" that leads him to leave Clara at Patterne for a morning while showing a house to her father—proves to be a deep mistake: it affords Colonel De Craye the opportunity to be alone with Clara, a state that Willoughby subsequently sees he should have predicted and avoided (184).

And finally, in the only moment where Willoughby genuinely succeeds in reflecting on himself, he subjects his own actions to a scathing criticism:

> Willoughby stood above himself, contemplating his active machinery, which he could partly criticize but could not stop, in a singular wonderment at the aims and schemes and tremours of one who was handsome, manly, acceptable in the world's eyes: and had he not loved himself most heartily he would have been divided to the extent of repudiating that urgent and excited half of his being, whose motions appeared as those of a body of insects perpetually erecting and repairing a structure of extraordinary pettiness. (288)

The crucial point here, of course, is that in this moment of real awareness all of his actions appear as nothing more than the work of insects, building something "of extraordinary pettiness." What this conveys most fundamentally is that Willoughby is not a man who has succeeded in developing an identity that he reflectively endorses; rather, he is driven by a series of wanton motives and inclinations that, when actually reflected upon, reveal themselves as essentially meaningless. However, the narrator goes on: "He loved himself too seriously to dwell on the division for more than a minute or so. But having seen it, and for the first time, as he believed, his passion for the young woman became surcharged with bitterness, atrabiliar" (288). Thus, the insight is only temporary; his egoism drives him almost immediately back into the perspective that gave rise to the petty actions in the first place.

This passage captures in a neat way the argument of the first movement of my interpretation, and offers a transition to the second. Willoughby is not self-controlled in anything like the way the Sidgwickian egoist is; rather, he is self-deceived and heteronomous, driven by powerful sexually charged urges that often conflict and which are certainly neither acknowledged nor integrated within a self through a principle. Indeed, at the one moment Willoughby gets enough distance on himself to start the sort of consideration that could produce such integration, he is disgusted by everything he has done and is doing. The idea at

the end of the narrator's remarks—that the distance does nothing other than embitter Willoughby's perception of Clara—suggests that the same forces that drive the division within oneself create a perspective that cannot see the reasons of others as *reasons*, or as bearing normative force; in this way, Meredith gestures at the need for recognizing other people for constituting onself.

Upon a first reading, one might doubt that Willoughby is blind to others at all: certainly, he does not have the kind of complete blindness to the perspectives of others that perhaps usually accompanies the sort of tyrannic egoism described here. As the reader is told in the first chapter of the novel, Sir Willoughby is "anything but obtuse" (9). Indeed, quite the opposite is true; after Clara remarks in an early conversation that he may be more himself in his letters to men than to women, the narrator represents Willoughby's reaction thus:

> The remark threw a pause across his thoughts. He was of a sensitiveness terribly tender. A single stroke on it reverberated swellingly within the man, and most, and infuriately searching, at the spots where he had been wounded, especially where he feared the world might have guessed the wound. Did she imply that he had no hand for love-letters? Was it her meaning that women would not have much taste for his epistolary correspondence? She had spoken in the plural, with an accent on "men." Had she heard of Constantia? Had she formed her own judgment about the creature? The supernatural sensitiveness of Sir Willoughby shrieked a peal of affirmatives. (55)

Of note here first of all is the notion of Sir Willoughby as "terribly sensitive": this is to say that his egoism is compatible not only with a bare capacity to attend to the perspectives of other people, but in fact compatible with a high degree of attention to and interest in them.

Indeed, as I will eventually suggest, the egoism is in part the cause of Willoughby's terrible sensitivity; there is good reason to think he would be less egoistic if he were less attentive to others. Moreover, as the passage represents, a probing of the other person's motivations constitutes this awareness; Willoughby is in fact interpreting Clara's remark by situating it within a context. Thus he searches for a meaning not just in Clara's words, but in her enunciation—here, the emphasis on the word "men," which Willoughby takes to reveal Clara's awareness of his previous engagement to Constantia Durham.

But this sensitiveness is not complete: at a number of moments, Willoughby fails to perceive the perspectives of others in such a way where he understands what they are doing and why they are doing it. And the narrator is quite clear about this; after a speech that happens to use the word "pardon," Willoughby substantially misunderstands Laetitia Dale's reaction:

> "For pardon! when we are straining to grant it!" Laetitia murmured, and it was as much as she could do […] There was no similarity between his idea and hers, but her idea had certainly been roused by his word "pardon", and he had the benefit of it in the moisture of her eyes […] He had heard something; he had not caught the words, but they were manifestly favorable; her sign of emotion assured him of it and of the success he had sought. There was one woman who bowed to him to all eternity! (263-64).

The passage emphasizes here the extent to which Willoughby is ignorant of what is going on in Laetitia's mind—as the narrator puts it, "there was no similarity between his idea and hers." And here, Willoughby quite clearly misinterprets the evidence; Laetitia has been essentially distracted by a single word (it calls to mind some thinking about herself) but Willoughby quite confidently interprets her reaction as a "manifestly favorable," one that

reassures his faith in himself. Indeed, this sort of ignorance gives the novel some of its comic effect: for another example, Willoughby fantasizes at some length about how he will punish Clara by requiring her to marry Vernon—in his version of the scene, "She declares the proposal revolting" (326). This is of course ironic, because as the reader knows, Clara and Vernon are sincerely attracted to each other, and so Willoughby's ignorance renders a fantasy he takes quite seriously rather comic to the reader.

Most dramatically, of course, Willoughby fails throughout the novel to understand why Clara is doing what she does. After an early embrace, he cannot see that she "came out of it with the sensations of the frightened child that has had its dip in sea-water" (50). Later, while Clara is wondering why Willoughby isn't trying to present himself more winningly, we learn that "this unfortunate gentleman imagined himself to be loved […] that everything relating to himself excited maidenly curiosity" (91). Indeed, it takes Willoughby a surprisingly long time to learn that Clara isn't actually in love with him—even though she tells him this—and when he does learn, it is only because he sees her with another man (190). The narrator explains what causes much of this confusion: "He, a fairly intelligent man, and very sensitive, was blinded to what was going on within her visibly enough, by her production of the article he demanded of her sex" (93). Because Clara's outward representation conforms to his expectations, he fails to perceive the quite discordant motivations that underlie her performance, which the narrator emphasizes are visible enough to anyone not blinded by egoism.

And his attempts to manipulate her subsequently often fail because he cannot properly perceive her. For instance, his attempt to use Laetitia Dale to make Clara jealous fails because he doesn't recognize the distance between him and her: as the narrator puts it, "he believed in Clara's jealousy because he had intended to rouse it; under the form of

emulation, feebly […] But for the seriousness of her desire to be released from the engagement, that was little credible" (119). Here, Willoughby makes two key mistakes: he thinks that Clara is jealous when she is not, and believes that she is not serious in wanting to leave him when she is.

Reconciling these two aspects of Willoughby's perception of others—his sensitivity on the one hand, and his blindness on the other—requires a distinction. For Willoughby, the beliefs, intentions, and actions of others seem to matter first of all as evidence of the agent's attitude towards him, and only secondarily if at all as material for an explanation of her rational behavior. And while he is deeply sensitive to the people around him on the first matter, he is ignorant on the second. It is possible even to suggest a causal relationship; because he cares so much about understanding how people feel towards him, Willoughby has a very poor understanding of how they make sense of their actions to themselves. Thus the narrator explains: "Men whose pride is their backbone suffer convulsions where other men are barely aware of a shock" (56). The point here—and this is what the narrator has in mind as well in calling Willoughby's sensitiveness "terrible"—is that to be attentive to others' attitudes towards oneself is to render a number of otherwise innocuous actions psychically traumatic, as the smallest behaviors take on the implication of reflecting a critical attitude.

This is of course a result of Willoughby's upbringing: "The little prince's education teaches him that he is other than you" (14). And more significantly, it is the cause of his retreat from "the world," meaning in particular London, and his insistence in conversation with Clara that their life should be lived on a country estate (55). The narrator explains:

> Within the shadow of his presence he compressed opinion, as a strong frost binds the springs of earth, but beyond it his shivering sensitiveness ran about in dread of a

> stripping in a wintry atmosphere. This was the ground of his hatred of the world: it was an appalling fear on behalf of his naked eidolon, the tender infant Self swaddled in his name before the world […] Must we not detest a world that so treats us? We loathe it the more, by the measure of our contempt for them, when we have made the people within the shadow-circle of our person slavish.

The immediately relevant point here is the explanation that Willoughby hates the world "on behalf of his naked eidolon" and "infant self." The inability to bear critique, and the corresponding need for constant approval and reassurance, is what I think the narrator means in calling "pride" Willoughby's backbone. And as a first iteration, it is this pride that names the desire an erotic obsession with which turns Willoughby into something like Korsgaard's tyrant.

But the passage points toward a further aspect of Willoughby's perspective on others. The reason he cannot stand the "world" is because it critiques him, but the reason it is capable of critiquing him is that he cannot "compress opinion," as he does to those " in the shadow of his presence." And the end of the passage corresponds to this notion: Willoughby makes the "people within the shadow-circle of our person slavish": he reduces them to mere objects for expression of his will. And the narrator reiterates this idea elsewhere:

> In the hundred and fourth chapter of the thirteenth volume of the Book of Egoism it is written: Possession without obligation to the object possessed approaches felicity. It is the rarest condition of ownership. For example: the possession of land is not without obligation both to the soil and the tax-collector; the possession of fine clothing is oppressed by obligation; gold, jewelry, works of art, enviable household furniture, are positive fetters; the possession of a wife we find surcharged with

> obligation. In all these cases possession is a gentle term for enslavement, bestowing the sort of felicity attained to by the helot drunk. You can have the joy, the pride, the intoxication of possession; you can have no free soul. But there is one instance of possession, and that the most perfect, which leaves us free, under not a shadow of obligation, receiving ever, never giving, or if giving, giving only of our waste; […] Our possession of an adoring female's worship is this instance. The soft cherishable Parsee is hardly at any season other than prostrate. She craves nothing save that you continue in being—her sun. (110)

This articulates at a theoretical level Willoughby's attitude toward other people: he sees them as possessions. But not just any sort of possession: he sees them as "possession without obligation." This is revealing, because—after all—to be capable of placing obligations on someone is to be capable of generating reasons for action; one way to understand what my reasons are is just to say that they are the projects you are obligated to respect. And so to possess something without obligation is to be able to treat it as not capable of generating reasons.

The way the passage explicates the idea is suggestive. In the cases where an agent possesses with obligation—landowners, art collectors, and ordinary married people—it's telling that they are "positive fetters." I am inclined to read them as "fettering" precisely because they bind the possessor to certain *projects*: the landowner, for example, must continue to care for the land. And it is because they so bind the owner that he has no "free soul": in being obligated by the possession in this way, the owner constitutes his identity precisely in his relation to that possession. But the possession of an "adoring female's worship" does not require such a constitution; in "craving nothing save that you continue in being," she allows the Egoist to remain undefined. This is significant, because it shows how

the Egoist's refusal to respect others is also in large part a refusal to appropriately respect himself. After all, it should not be a constraint that one is bound to the projects of one's life; at the center of Korsgaard's conception of identity is the notion that this is how one constitutes oneself as a person; thus, the Egoist's refusal to do so is telling.

A final point is worth emphasizing. To see people as either possessions or possible possessions is necessarily to take an adversarial stance towards their reasons. Their actions will never be fully comprehensible; they will instead always be things-they-are-doing-to-escape, or things-they-do-to-resist. This is what I have in mind in claiming that Willoughby sees the reasons of others as obstacles; he has no sense of their normativity, because it is always just either their accordance with or divergence from his requirements for them.

We see this attitude emerge in Willoughby's conversations at a number of moments. For instance, in the midst of their conversation about "the world," Willoughby asks Clara, "Is the world agreeable to holiness?" and she responds, "Then, are you in favor of monasteries?" (55). Willoughby's response is revealing; the narrator tells us: "He poured a little runlet of half laughter over her head, of the sound assumed by genial compassion. It is irritating to hear that when we imagine we have spoken to the point" (55). The point here, of course, is that Willoughby is not really listening to Clara—or more precisely, he is listening only to mock her for her beliefs, not to engage with her in an actual conversation.

Furthermore, when Clara is first introduced to the regular inhabitants of Patterne Hall, she is struck by the way they have been reduced by Willoughby's aura, how he can "subject the members of his household to the state of satellites." She sees that his sisters have had their "individuality disciplined out of them" and made into "his shadows, his echoes" (64), and "even Mr. Whitford forbore to alarm the sentiment of authority in his cousin" (67). Perhaps most interesting here is the way Willoughby effects these changes

through a policing of the body: "He was very sensitive to the intentions of eyes and tones, which was one secret of his rigid grasp of the dwellers in his household. They were taught that they had to render agreement under sharp scrutiny" (64). Given his "terrible sensitivity," he requires his subjects not merely to agree with him in their opinions and actions, but in their very comportment.

Due to his disregard for their reasons and capacities as rational interlocutors, it is perhaps not surprising that Willoughby weighs the affective elements of his relationships heavily. He is in fact quite open about this: explaining that he never lets any of his dependents pay for anything, he remarks: "I confess to exacting that kind of dependency. I do not claim servitude, I stipulate for affection. I claim to be surrounded by persons loving me" (70). Upon reflection, we can see why his egoism leads this way. To engage in contracts with others is to have to negotiate with them, to hear their reasons and respond to them. Willoughby has no interest in this. He requires instead that other persons respond affectively to him, at a level below rational deliberation.

Such subrational responsiveness is key to understanding the way Willoughby uses his sexuality. Clara, who at one moment thinks of the "divineness of separation," (65) experiences Willoughby's physical advances on her as deeply oppressive; for instance, when she manages to avoid an embrace by picking a flower, she thinks of the "caress" as a "monster" that "swept by" (107). Similarly, after Clara tells Willoughby about a headache, the narrator explains somewhat cryptically that "she had to pay the fee for inviting a solicitous accepted gentleman's proximity," a euphemism that becomes explicit in Clara's subsequent thoughts:

> This time she blamed herself and him, and the world he abused, and destiny into the bargain. And she cared less about the probation; but she craved for liberty. With a

> frigidity that astonished her, she marvelled at the act of kissing, and at the obligation it forced upon an inanimate person to be an accomplice. Why was she not free? By what strange right was it that she was treated as a possession? (51)

What the passage points out is the way Clara experiences sexuality as something alien to herself. As Willoughby is embracing her, she openly thinks of herself as "frigid," and sees kissing as forcing an obligation on her. Indeed, in the suggestion that kissing turns a person into an accomplice, the passage overtly explains how Willoughy's sexuality functions to reduce her to a tool to manipulate. And it is telling finally that Willoughby understands this effect of physical intimacy: late in the novel, after Willoughy understands how much Clara dislikes him, we learn that: "To sting the blood of the girl, he called her his darling, and half enwound her, shadowing forth a salute. She strung her body to submit." Here, Willoughby has the straightforward intention "to sting" Clara's blood, and recognizes that the best way to do so is to his impose himself physically and emotionally on her, and it again has the effect of forcing her outwardly to "submit."

This attitude culminates both dramatically and philosophically in Meredith's representation of Clara's reasoning and the ways in which the other characters engage with it, which—as the final third of my interpretation will show—portrays Willoughby and Dr. Middleton as disregarding Clara's rational capacity precisely by appearing to take it seriously. In particular, Willoughby argues throughout the novel that Clara's promise to marry him is binding, and to a large extent the other characters agree with him: as Vernon Whitford puts it, "Men have a right to expect you to know your own minds when you close on a bargain" (274). What matters here is the general belief that Willoughby is only fairly holding Clara to her own word, and that in refusing to let her escape he is precisely treating her as a rational person capable of making a binding promise, rather than as a child whose word is unreliable.

This belief is coupled with Willoughby's espoused psychology of love, which claims that—as he puts it to Laetitia—"love is eternal" (335). By extension, the consensus of the novel's characters establishes that either Clara made the mistake of promising her word without loving him, or now wishes to betray her love by leaving him; the notion that Clara might have been at first attracted to Willoughby and subsequently disinclined to marry him is not a logical possibility.

The tension involved here emerges most vividly in the peculiar battle Clara fights against herself, which she sees as waged against her own reason and virtue: having been "caged" by "her word of honour," she must be "brave enough to be dishononourable" (73). And as a result she semi-consciously concludes that she must deceive herself about what is happening—"she foresaw within herself," among other things, that "little sacrifices of her honesty might be made" (88). This takes a number of forms; among them, Clara tries to redescribe the breach as an act of sympathetic sacrifice, claiming that she could not make Sir Willoughby happy and that he deserves a better wife. As the narrator explains, this "pity" for Sir Willoughy arises out of "her capacity to make anything serve her by passing into with the glance which discerned its usefulness," a state the narrator openly calls "hypocrisy" (102). And later, just before the climactic scene of confrontation with Willoughby and her father, we learn that Clara has had to "come to terms with her conscience." More dramatically, during the scene itself—to which I will return in a moment—the narrator tells us that "Reason […] was animated by her better nature to plead her case against her […] she echoed Willoughby consciously, doubling her horror with the consciousness" (345). The point here is that Clara experiences her conflict with Willoughby as in part a rise against her own "better nature" and faculty of reasoning, which would seem to imply Willoughby is indeed just respecting her rational capacity in attempting to hold her to her promise.

But of course, this is to overlook Meredith's complex analysis of the socially constructed psychology of gender, and once we see this it becomes clear how Willoughby is using an appeal to Clara's "reason" precisely to dismiss it. Neither Willoughby nor Dr. Middleton really believe that Clara is capable of committing herself rationally, and as a result their insistence that she be bound by her word is deeply hypocritical. More specifically, they show in both actions and words that they believe women are incapable of acting on reasons; thus Willoughby thinks, "We see in women the triumph of the animal over the spiritual" (74), and Dr. Middleton rather bluntly calls Clara's speech "the cry of an animal," while telling her that her "behavior [takes the] shape" of one (344).

Both men reflect at length on this idea. Willoughby thinks that "woman's love […] will only be nourished by the reflex light she catches of you in the eyes of others, she having no passion of her own, but simply an instinct driving her to attach herself to whatsoever is most largely admired, most shining" (248). This reveals the core beliefs underneath his eloquence about the "eternity" of love; in fact, he sees women as essentially malleable, having "no passion of" their own, and subsequently drawn only to the most elegant man in their immediate presence. Dr. Middleton is even more damning; when asked if Clara has given any reasons for rejecting Willoughby, he replies by extending the animal comparison:

> "The cat […] that humps her back in the figure of the letter H, or a Chinese bridge, has given the dog her answer and her reasons, we may presume: but he that undertakes to translate them into human speech might likewise venture to propose an addition to the alphabet and a continuation of Homer. (287)

Here Dr. Middleton makes quite clear the point that was only implicit earlier: it is a mistake to think of the way women are motivated as being in any substantive way like "human"—meaning male—rationality. Trying to translate the causes of their actions into reasons

comprehensible from the rational perspective is just as misguided as attributing reasons to a cat's act of stretching herself in a particular shape.

Later, Dr. Middleton explains what he thinks is really going on when women deliberate. After pressing Clara for her reasons, he mentions to Willoughby that in asking for them "we are directing the girl to dissect a caprice," and as Clara is hurriedly leaving, remarks:

> She does not waste time in her mission to procure that astonishing product of a shallow soil, her reasons; if such be the object of her search. But no: it signifies that she deems herself to have need of composure—nothing more. No one likes to be turned about; we like to turn ourselves about; and in the question of an act to be committed, we stipulate that it shall be our act—girls and others. After the lapse of an hour, it will appear to her as her act. (349)

The dismissiveness inherent in his diagnosis of Clara's deliberations as "the astonishing product of a shallow soil" is of course key, but perhaps more significant is his diagnosis of what has in fact been going on. The notion of Clara's reasons as "caprices" is telling; it indicates that he sees Clara's statements not as explanations of her thinking but as fantasies she invents. Again it posits the reason as an obstacle: a caprice is a psychological phenomenon to be overcome before serious deliberation can begin, not something a rational agent ought to take seriously. But we should note further Dr. Middleton's sense that "we like to turn ourselves about." The goal here is not rational deliberation but autonomy; he is noting that we prefer to be self-caused rather than directed by others. Crucially, though, he thinks this is no real obstacle in Clara's case. Because she is not capable of rational deliberation, for her the process of reasoning is mere internalization of an exterior injunction; as he so chillingly puts it, "after the lapse of an hour, it will appear to be her act."

This is to posit Clara again as fundamentally changeable—as Willoughby also saw it, to see her as susceptible to whatever influence is strongest.

And this points again to the hypocrisy of the two men. At the same moment while they are claiming that Clara has bound herself permanently by having vowed to marry Willoughby, they both deny that she has the ability to bind herself in such a way at all. And the two emblematize a male society that, in Meredith's analysis, has created a culture whereby women cannot in fact deliberate rationally: having internalized the male attitude towards themselves, they are alienated from their reason. One formally innovative passage makes this particularly clear:

> "And if I marry, and then . . . Where will honour be then? I marry him to be true to my word of honour, and if then . . . !" An intolerable languor caused her to sigh profoundly. It is written as she thought it; she thought in blanks, as girls do, and some women. A shadow of the male Egoist is in the chamber of their brains overawing them. (94)

Here, the narrator steps to an extra-diegetic level in explaining his own style, emphasizing the fact that the male presence—the "shadow of the male Egoist"—has crippled her deliberative abilities. Thus, some of her thoughts are substantively blank, represented only by ellipses in the text. The narrator makes the same point directly somewhat later, claiming that since "total ignorance" is the "pledge of purity" women make to men, "they have to expunge the writing of their perceptives on the tablets of the brain: they have to know not when they do know" (170). Given this context, the male insistence that Clara's engagement to Willoughby was made freely, fairly, and in full knowledge of the man in question, and therefore ought to be binding, reveals itself for what it is: an attempt to humiliate and shame Clara into compliance through an appearance of treating her rationally.

This becomes clearest in the two dramatic scenes at the end of the novel, when Dr. Middleton and Willoughby alike press Clara for "reasons." If Clara wants to be free of her engagement, as Dr. Middleton says to her, she must "furnish reasons, and they must be good ones" (348). However, when they are actually in conversation, what takes place is a mockery of what shared deliberation would look like. Willoughby claims, "My appeal to her is for an explanation or a pardon," but what the following scenes show is that of course he is lying: he does not really want an explanation, but wants rather to put Clara through the drama of offering one in order to defeat it and make her appear irrational. This is at the heart of what it means to treat the reasons of others as obstacles, in a way that denies their normativity. This emerges dramatically in the conversation between Clara and her father at a point of climax:

> "Reach the good man your hand, my girl […]
>
> "It is more than I can do, father."
>
> "How, it is more than you can do? You are engaged to him, a plighted woman."
>
> "I do not wish to marry."
>
> "The apology is inadequate."
>
> "I am unworthy. . ."
>
> "Chatter! chatter!"
>
> "I beg him to release me."
>
> "Lunacy!"
>
> "I have no love to give him."
>
> "Have you gone back to your cradle, Clara Middleton?" (342)

This is almost a parody of what it means for two people to deliberate together. Dr. Middleton is not interested in listening to his daughter's reasons; he is instead shouting them

down. This emerges first in what ought to be a decisive reason—Clara's claim that she doesn't want to get married. Dr. Middleton's response is significant; he claims that this is not a reason for action but instead a fact presented as an *apology*—the same way I might say "it is raining" as an excuse for my being wet, as opposed to saying "it is raining" as a reason to go inside. And not only does he treat it as an apology, but as an *inadequate* one: it does not serve to excuse Clara's behavior.

Korsgaard describes a kind of rational failure that occurs when one treats another's reasons not *as* reasons, but as "obstacles"; as she imagines such an agent in shared deliberation, "I don't try to work out something that's good for both of us, because your reasons are *nothing* to me, and any objections that might be grounded in your reasons are nothing to me: I can't see why your reasons should count" (SC 193). Such a stance is almost impossible to embody: dismissing someone's reasons so overtly, Korsgaard writes, is often like trying to hear her speech as babble. Once I understand a language, I cannot help but understand a speaker of it; similarly, she argues, when someone calls my name, I cannot help but turn towards her—the norm is inescapable (*Sources* 143). But the same sort of failure has a weaker manifestation: such an egoist can grasp the existence of another's reasons, but then treat the reasons simply as features of the world to reconcile with his pursuit of his own ends: tools to use if he can, and obstacles to overcome if he cannot (SC 194).

Dr. Middleton manifests something very much like these attitudes towards Clara. In dismissing her reference to her desires as an inadequate apology, he treats her reasons as features simply to be overcome: they do not in any way justify her behavior. Moreover, in proclaiming Clara's statement about worthiness as "chatter," he comes close to the sort of egoism Korsgaard thinks is almost impossible in hearing her reasons as gibberish, irrational

to the point of incomprehensibility. The dismissal here is even clearer in the next line, when he proclaims her insane in response to her direct request to break the engagement.

And of course the final lines of the scene captures this dismissal of Clara's agency precisely. When Clara claims that she cannot love Willoughby, her father treats this as if she is merely whining. What is striking is how clearly Clara has not been offering mere excuses, but instead trying to explain herself. But Dr. Middleton will not hear her in this register; rather, he treats her like a child, engaging her statements not as reasons with which one engages, but as complaints to be overcome. A moment later, Clara thinks to herself, "What could she say? he is an Egoist?" and rejects the notion because "The epithet has no meaning in such a scene" (345). The theoretical context explains why Clara thinks this: egoism is simply the name for the refusal to accept her reasons. And were she to try to name this, it would be empty. To someone who does not accept that a reason is a justifiable ground for action, it does no good to assert that it is, for this is just to say that one's reasons are reasonable, and that Clara's reasons are reasonable is precisely what the two men have already denied.

Furthermore, I think this is why Meredith, in the novel's climactic Chapter 43—where it becomes clear that Willoughby has proposed to Laetitia Dale and therefore proved himself unfaithful—gives the essential action to Vernon Whitford, rather than Clara herself (367). Indeed, Clara tries to use Willoughby's faithlessness as a reason to break the engagement a few pages earlier, only to have him laugh it off (364). Both men can dismiss her claims easily, because neither sees them in such a way where they would compel respect. Thus, it is only Vernon, who, in being another man, confirms the validity of the reason Clara has already attempted to cite. But even this isn't quite correct, because Vernon draws out the conditions for the breaking of the engagement from Dr. Middleton himself, who is by this

point fully identified with Willoughby. As Vernon asks, "you maintain, sir, that when faith is broken by one, the engagement ceases, and the other is absolutely free?" (368), and Dr. Middleton answers that he "is the champion of that platitude." It is only then that Clara "slipped her arm under her father's," and we can see why. Ultimately, the Egoist cannot see the reasons of others as motivational, and is only moved by his own deliberation. Therefore, Dr. Middleton himself must offer the principle by which Clara might escape; were either she or Vernon to assert it, the egoism of Dr. Middleton would simply deny its normativity.

* * *

Let me take a step back. Sidgwick's explanation of the Dualism of Practical Reason rests on the possibility of a certain kind of egoist, one who could weigh all of the options at any given moment of choice and select the one that maximized his own happiness. The psychology of such an agent is crucial to Sidgwick's ultimate failure to offer grounds for moral normativity, because he concludes that he can offer no reason such an agent would be compelled to respect in support of the rationality of moral action. The constitutivist metatethics of novelists like George Eliot and George Meredith, however, as depicted in their alternative conceptions of egoism, point the way towards a solution. Such thinkers reconceive the nature of rationality, suggesting that any account that successfully explained why an agent had a reason to care about her own "interests" would require her to care about others as well. In this way, sympathy reveals itself as more than just a tool for deliberation: it is the necessary outcome of the kind of intersubjectively constituted subjects agents are, and the very ground for the obligations we owe to each other.

In these first chapters, I have tended to emphasize the positive effects of self-conceptions, interpreting Meredith and Eliot as describing the moral value of practical identities and conceptions of the good. However, Charles Dickens's works demonstrate

skepticism about this claim: in his depiction, the projects created by conceptions of the good often prove morally crippling, insofar as they lead agents to dismiss more immediate duties. In this way, Dickens challenges one of the fundamental components of Kantian ethics: though he reworks some key Kantian ideas in his own terms, nevertheless his ethics point to the many substantive ways in which Victorian novelists questioned the "unreflective Kantianism" of their era. I turn to this dynamic now.

Charles Dickens on Identity and Obligation

Charles Dickens's fiction has generally been read, both in the nineteenth century and now, as developing an alternative to the forms of moral deliberation central to utilitarian thought.[279] Martha Nussbaum has recently offered a powerful version of this interpretation; in her view, Dickens's model of appropriate moral agency requires that the abstracting process of the utilitarian rational calculus be supplemented by imagination and emotion. The novel *Hard Times* itself exemplifies Dickens's alternate model of deliberation; as she puts it, "the novel speaks not of dismissing reason, but of coming upon it in a way illuminated by fancy, which is here seen as a faculty both creative and veridical.[280] Nussbaum's account is persuasive as far as it goes; however, it seems possible to go further. Dickens's theory of deliberation stems from an alternate conception of the self, one that sees it as composed of moral sentiments stemming from a human nature. And it is possible to misunderstand Dickens's depiction of moral deliberation unless it is situated in the broader context of his thinking about selfhood.

I can best bring out the possible problems against the background of Valerie Wainwright's interpretation of Dickens. In her reading of *Hard Times*, Wainwright draws on

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[279] This understanding of Dickens emerges, for instance, in the contemporary reaction to *Hard Times*. John Ruskin liked the book the best among Dickens's novels, while E.P. Whipple condemned Dickens's economic commentary. See "A Note on *Hard Times*" and "On The Economic Fallacies of *Hard Times*," in *Hard Times*, ed. Fred Kaplan and Sylvére Monod (New York: Norton 2001):355-356, 347-351. Further citations to this edition included parenthetically in the text.

[280] Nussbaum, "The Literary Imagination in Public Life," 437. She has engaged *Hard Times* in, I believe, three different essays. She makes preliminary remarks in *Love's Knowledge* (especially 76-77), offers an extended reading in "The Literary Imagination in Public Life" (*New Literary History* 22.4 (Autumn 1991): 877-910), and then centers a book around her interpretation of Dickens's critique in *Poetic Justice* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995). Further citations to these texts are included parenthetically in the text.

Harry Frankfurt's characterizations of the self to explain the variety of agents in Dickens's novels; as she puts it, "In Frankfurt's lucid exposition of the voluntarist thesis, we have—I suggest—the underlying premise upon which Dickens's moral typology of character is constructed" (118). The "voluntarist thesis" echoes the idea of a conception of the good and practical identity I traced earlier: the notion is that the self is crucially composed by a certain self-conception, through which an agent endorses certain desires, making them central to her agency and will.

Wainwright thinks this is essential for understanding the function of love in *Hard Times*; I quote at length:

> The good will, as personified in Sissy and Rachel [*Hard Times* characters], is at once free *and* constrained. Among the most important characteristics of the two women are their capacities for loving and caring; and it is a characteristic of this love that it willingly accepts the ties that are thereby created. The Platonic preacher [Ralph] Cudworth […] described the paradoxical nature of this love with great clarity: 'Love is at once a Freedome from all Law, a state of purest Liberty, and yet a Law too, of the most constraining and indispensable Necessity" (119

The specific aspect of Frankfurt's thought Wainwright is invoking here is the idea of a "volitional necessity."[281] Frankfurt thinks, as we've seen, that agents create themselves through identification with certain projects, which then become cares; as he puts it at one point, "the person, in making a decision by which he identifies with a desire, constitutes himself."[282] In coming to care about and indeed to love a certain project, an agent's

[281] I have expressed my own view about the nature of volitional necessities elsewhere; see my "Freedom, Self-Obligation, and Selfhood in Henry James," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 66.1 (Summer 2011): 69-95.
[282] "Identification and Wholeheartedness," 170. In *The Importance of What We Care About* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 159-177.

identifications operate in a peculiar way as constraints on her will.[283] When acting on the basis of such projects, an agent experiences a deep kind of autonomy—even when the agent seems to have no choice in the matter (87). Frankfurt gives the example of Martin Luther's claim, "Here I stand; I can do no other," after nailing his theses to the door of the Wittenberg Chapel"; taking Luther at his word, Frankfurt suggests that sometimes we can indeed care so deeply about a project that we have no choice but to act on it.[284] However, we do not experience this as constraint; rather, Frankfurt argues, it is precisely in such moments when we feel most ourselves.

Now I agree with Wainwright that for Dickens, actions in the service of love are both free and constrained; I agree further with the argument that this paradox is possible because the action is not voluntary but is in fact self-controlled. But I think Wainwright is mistaken about why Dickensian love is self-controlled, because she mistakes the Dickensian self. Dickens did not endorse what Wainwright calls the "voluntarist thesis"; in fact, he accepted something like its opposite. To see this, consider Marya Schechtman's response to Frankfurt in her essay "Self-Expression and Self-Control." Schechtman notes that Frankfurt's view rests in part on the common-sense notion that we are most ourselves when we are most self-controlled.[285] This is, for instance, the sense that we invoke when we say something rude, and then excuse ourselves by saying something along the lines of, "I'm sorry, I'm not myself today." To put it in Frankfurt's terms, when I say something rude accidentally, I act on a desire that I do not identify with but which has overpowered my

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[283] It might sound odd to say that one loves a project. As Frankfurt explains in *The Reasons of Love*, the best way to understand love in this way is to think of the love parents have for their children, not of the the romantic love spouses have for each other. That's because parenting is a project that stems from a certain way of constituting oneself. *The Reasons of Love* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006): 43.
[284] "The Importance of What We Care About," in *The Importance of What We Care About* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 87.
[285] Marya Schechtman, "Self-Expression and Self-Control." In *Ratio* 17.4 (Winter 2004), 409-427, 413. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

usual self-control. As such, there is a real sense in which it isn't precisely my self that has acted, a philosophical point I invoke in apologizing.

But, as Schechtman argues, Frankfurt's view "seems open to challenges based on the fact that we frequently view overly rigid self-control as an impediment to being oneself […] on this picture, the self resides in repudiated desire which break through despite a person's struggles against them" (413-14). Schechtman goes on to specify this objection in a thought experiment:

> Imagine a woman in a traditional American town in the 1950's who is wholeheartedly committed to fulfilling her duties as a wife and mother as understood by the standards of her social context. She is, however, frequently troubled by desires to take courses at the local college, spend time with her friends, apply for part-time jobs, or get involved in political causes. As powerful and persistent as these desires are, the woman does her best to suppress them. She views them as selfish and unfeminine, and struggles hard to keep them at bay. (416-17)

Schechtman's point here is that our intuitions about this woman differ from those we have about Frankfurt's examples of self-control. Far from thinking that this woman is succeeding at being herself, because she is effectively suppressing her desires, we think she is failing to be herself for precisely that reason. We imagine, in this sense, that the woman has a "nature," which is being repressed by her refusal to acknowledge it. Schechtman describes this nature as a complex of "robust inclinations"; while admitting that the idea of distinction between a "natural" and non-natural inclination is philosophically fraught, she argues that we can tentatively define an inclination as robust when it is: 1) "stable, coherent, and powerful," 2) does "not have [its] origin in any obvious physical or psychological pathology," and 3) targeted at not a specific state of affairs, but at a "way of being or a type of life" (415).

This view of the self had a deep appeal in the Romantic era. It is of course present in central ways in Rousseau's work; Thomas Reid and the Common Sense school of Scottish philosophers held a version of it; and, essentially for our purposes, it is importantly present in the work of the eighteenth-century sentimental novelists and some of the Romantic poets, particularly Wordsworth.[286] These figures were in turn important for Dickens, and I want to suggest that the sentimental impulses of the core self played a crucial role in his thinking about identity. Thus, *contra* Wainwright, love and care matter not so much because they are the product of reflective self-control and therefore our genuine self, but rather because they are the product of our core sentimental nature—and *therefore* our genuine self.

In suggesting this, I am broadly following the tradition of interpretations of Dickens's sentimentality. Fred Kaplan puts it this way:

> Dickens believed that there was an instinctive, irrepressible need for human beings to affirm both in private and in public that they possessed moral sentiments, that these sentiments were innate, that they best expressed themselves through spontaneous feelings […] People—all people, except those who had been the victims of perverse conditioning or some misfortune of nature—instinctively felt, in Dickens's view, pleasure, *moral* pleasure, when those they thought of as good triumphed and those they thought of as bad were defeated (3).

For our purposes, the key point here is the notion of moral sentiments as innate and instinctive; they are innate, presumably, because they derive from some aspect of essential human identity. Kaplan goes on to suggest that there is a trajectory in Dickens's works regarding these sentiments. If in the early fiction he is convinced that the moral sentiments

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[286] For a discussion of this intellectual heritage and its significance for Dickens, see Fred Kaplan's *Sacred Tears:Sentimentality in Victorian Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), especially chapter 1, where he offers a brief history of philosophical and novelistic sentimentality in the eighteenth century and explains its relevance for Dickens.

are always and everywhere irrepressible, by the middle and late novels Dickens becomes more and more interested in what Kaplan calls "perverse conditioning": the way such sentiments can be warped.

In the early novel *Oliver Twist*, for example, the question of the corruptibility of the moral sentiments is a central theme. The criminal leader Fagin relies upon its possibility; "the wily old Jew had the boy in his toils," the narrator tells us, and "having prepared his mind, by solitude and gloom, to prefer any society to the companionship of his own sad thoughts in such a dreary place, was now slowly instilling into his soul the poison which he hoped would blacken it, and change its hue forever."[287] We see here that Fagin not only thinks sentimental corruption is possible, but in fact thinks he knows how to bring it about: by creating a criminal society around Oliver's depression, he hopes to lure Oliver into the criminal community. And, as he puts it to Bill Sykes a few pages later, "Once let [Oliver] feel that he is one of us; once fill his mind with the idea that he has been a thief; and he's ours!" (137).

Crucially, though, Fagin is wrong about human nature, a fact that becomes particularly clear in the narrative of the prostitute Nancy. When she goes to visit Rose Maylie to tell her where Oliver is, the narrator explains her actions thus:

> The girl's life had been squandered in the streets, and among the most noisome of the stews and dens of London, but there was something of the woman's original nature left in her still […] this degraded being felt too proud to betray a feeble gleam of the womanly feeling which she thought a weakness, but which alone connected her with that humanity, of which her wasting life had obliterated so many, many traces when she a very child. (266)

[287] *Oliver Twist*, ed. Fred Kaplan (New York: Norton, 1993): 131. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

The emphasis here on Nancy's "original nature" and her underlying, nearly "obliterated humanity" is crucial, for it reveals Dickens's sense of something like Schechtman's robust inclinations. Despite Nancy's constitution of herself as a criminal, in other words, certain moral feelings at the core of her nature demand expression. And this reveals the mistake in Fagin's view of human nature; he is wrong to think that his criminal associations could permanently corrupt Oliver.[288]

And of course, Dickens famously defends this view of Nancy in the preface to the third edition of the novel. "It is useless to discuss," he contends, "whether the conduct and character of the girl seems natural or unnatural, probably or improbable, right or wrong. IT IS TRUE […] It is emphatically God's truth, for it is the truth He leaves in such depraved and miserable breasts; the hope yet lingering behind, the last fair drop of water at the bottom of the dried-up weed-choked well" (6-7). Here again, we find Dickens asserting the existence of a core part of human nature that cannot be corrupted; it is the "truth" God leaves in Nancy. Indeed, we find this in Oliver as well: Fagin's plan fails, and Oliver's better nature grows to such an extent that he asks God to forgive Fagin (356). One might also contend that the irrepressibility of Oliver's core self appears in his language—as other critics have noted, Oliver does not speak like someone brought up in the poor circumstances he experiences, but instead like a bourgeois child.[289] This representational decision reflects

[288] Of course, the seeds of Dickens's later worries are already present in the fact that Nancy cannot fully reform herself. As Amanda Anderson notes in *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), "Nancy's latent purity is proven by the fact that she knows she cannot be saved. Mr Brownlow and Rose Maylie mistakenly think that Nancy can be extricated from this trap and start life anew, but [Nancy] reveals the prostitute's catch-22 in her response: "I am chained to my old life. I loathe and hate it now, but I cannot leave it" (90). As I will show, this helpless recognition is an important idea in Dickens's later novels, where it assumes greater prominence.

[289] See, for instance, Keith Hollingsworth's essay "The Newgate Novel and the Moral Argument" in the Norton Critical edition of the novel, where he argues that "Oliver has the improbable language and deportment of a little gentleman" (*Oliver Twist* 472).

Dickens's attempt to portray the resistance Oliver's inner nature presents to the hardness of his social circumstances.

Particularly in the later novels, Dickens's sentimental theory of the self is suggestively intertwined with the formal patterns of his narrative structures. Dickens is famous for his diverse and fascinating minor characters, perhaps most commonly designated as "eccentric" figures. The critical interest in these characters has grown in recent years as a result of Alex Woloch's 2003 book, *The One vs. The Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel*; Woloch explicitly interprets Dickens's framework of oppositions between protagonists and minor characters and develops a terminology—"character-system" and "character-space"—to describe them.[290] He describes the feature of Dickens's works I am interested in thus:

> More than with any other nineteenth-century novelist, minor characters are at the heart of Dickens's fictional achievement. As George Orwell memorably writes, "Dickens is obviously a writer whose parts are greater than his wholes. He is all fragments, all details—rotten architecture, but wonderful gargoyles." (126)

And later:

> [A]s we might expect, the affective presence of minor characters registers on the other side of the asymmetric structure, namely, in the weakening of the protagonist's affective centrality. Dickens's novels rarely break from a central protagonist, just as the forceful presence of his minor characters does not alter their position *as* secondary characters. The novels almost all retain the superficial shell of asymmetry, but the actual content has been massively shifted. From Samuel Pickwick, Oliver

[290] Woloch defines these terms thus: the character-space is "that particular and character encounter between an individual human personality and a determined space and position within the narrative as a whole," while a character-system is "the arrangement of multiple and differentiated character-spaces—differential configurations and manipulations of the human figure—into a unified narrative structure" (14).

> Twist, and Nicholas Nickleby to Arthur Clennam, Pip, and John Harmon, Dickens's central figures are overshadowed by the minor characters that surround them. (132)

What is relevant here for my purposes is Woloch's recognition that the "forceful presence" of the minor characters is taken, so to speak, from the protagonists. In other words, the minor characters must overshadow the protagonists to realize the sort of space Dickens allots them. This overshadowing has a corresponding effect on the identity of the protagonist characters; as George Levine describes one such character, they become "bland" and "virtually nonexistent."[291]

Given Dickens's sense that the self is composed of moral sentiments, it seems to me that this formal feature of his novels reflects a way of thinking about ethics. It is significant that Dickens's minor characters are often morally flawed: in demonstrating the eccentricity that overwhelms the space of the protagonist, such characters also often manifest hypocrisy and blatant disregard of others. The narrative points, accordingly, to a certain kind of ethical ideal: the purely empty self, who is nothing other than an expression of moral sentiments.

Such a view has at least two revealing philosophical contexts. First, it complicates the critical understanding of Dickens's theory of moral deliberation. In understanding *Hard Times* as a critique of utilitarian deliberation, Nussbaum suggests that it resists a tendency towards aggregation. The problem Nussbaum has in mind appears fairly clearly in John Stuart Mill's explanation as to how an agent ought to decide which of two possible outcomes would make other agents happier:

> Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure. If one of the two is, by those who are

[291] *Realism, Ethics, and Secularism*, 233.

> competently acquainted with both, placed so far above the other that they prefer it, even though knowing it to be attended with a greater amount of discontent, and would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasure which their nature is capable of, we are justified in ascribing to the preferred enjoyment a superiority in quality so far outweighing quantity as to render it, in comparison, of small account. (279)

Now, what Mill has in mind here is first of all an argument for the "higher" pleasures over "lower pleasures," which he most famously summed up in the claim that "It is better to be a man unsatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates unsatisfied than a fool satisfied' (281). But Mill's interpreters have noted that this passage explains a key aspect of the utilitarian model of deliberation. When moral agents are trying to determine what to do, the passage implies, they determine what outcomes are likely to produce the most happiness by consulting their sense of what agents who have experienced both options would prefer.[292] To borrow an example from the literature, one reason we share food with people who are hungry is that we generalize from our personal experience, and thus conclude that people who are hungry would prefer to have food rather than not have it.[293]

This way of thinking about other persons commits Mill to a certain disregard for individuality. To make my decisions vis a vis a particular person by drawing on my knowledge of general standards of happiness is in part to dismiss their particular sense of what is valuable from the deliberative model. Of course it is possible to overstate this; Mill can presumably acknowledge that in instances where it is possible, we can simply ask the affected agents which outcome they prefer. But the default model does not insist upon this;

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[292] Two famous discussions of utilitarianism and preferences are R.M Hare's *Moral Thinking: Its Levels, Method and Point.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), and Peter Singer's *Practical Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980).
[293] *Practical Ethics*, 9.

it instead elides individual differences into a concept of generic happiness and established preferences. In doing so, it ultimately dismisses other persons from our decision about what to do.

Nussbaum finds a version of this objection in *Hard Times*; she argues that the novel reveals the way in which the "economic-utilitarian mind" reduces "qualitative differences to quantitative differences":

> Instead of Louisa, Tom, Stephen, Rachael, in all of their complex qualitative diversity, their historical particularity, we have simply so and so many quantifiable "parcels of human nature." This effacement of qualitative difference is accomplished, we see, by a process of abstraction from all in people that is not easily funneled into mathematical formulae; so this mind, in order to measure what it measures, attends only to an abstract and highly general version of the human being, rather than to the diverse concreteness with which the novel confronts us. (431)

This is to say that *Hard Times* reveals the way in which utilitarian thought dismisses differences between persons, insofar as its model of deliberation relies on an abstracted general conception of humanity. Nussbaum explains further: "the Gradgrind [utilitarian] mind, bent on calculation, is determined to aggregate the data gained about and from individual lives, arriving at a picture of total or average utility that effaces personal separateness as well as qualitative difference" (432). What the bland protagonists suggest, however, is that Nussbaum's account requires a supplement. While Dickens might be skeptical of economic aggregation, he is also skeptical of "historical particularity": he is in fact tempted by a "general version of the human being," but simply defines that version differently that the utilitarian does. Rather than the fundamental fact of self-interest the

utilitarians highlight, Dickens sees the capacity for moral feelings as an ability universally shared.

In this tension between particularity and generality, or between particular self-conceptions and the self as moral sentiment, Dickens moreover refigures one of the central problems in liberal political thought, and thus moves closer to the tradition descending from Mill that he is so often seen as rejecting. John Rawls's work considers just this issue at some length. As he puts it, in political liberalism the "problem of interpersonal comparison" arises thus: "Giving conflicting comprehensive conceptions of the good, how is it possible to reach such a political understanding of what are to count as appropriate claims? (*Political Liberalism* 179). In other words, in a world with many alternate and opposing conceptions of which ends are worthy of pursuit, it is not obvious how to establish a political system that demarcates a possible range of conceptions as legitimate, while setting others off as unjust. The reason it is not obvious is that almost any suggested range will itself seem to depend on a particular conception of the good; Rawls explains: "None of these views of the meaning, value, and purpose of human life, as specified by the corresponding comprehensive religious or philosophical doctrines, is affirmed by citizens generally, and so the pursuit of any one of them through basic institutions gives political society a sectarian character" (*Political Liberalism* 180).

Rawls's famous solution is to propose that, in deciding which principles of justice to use as foundations for political institutions, individuals ought to imagine themselves in the "original position," behind a "veil of ignorance." In such a state, individuals abstract themselves away from all the particularities of their identity—including, importantly, their conception of the good:

> No one knows his place in society, his class position or social status; nor does he know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets or abilities, his intelligence and strength, and the like. Nor, again, does anyone know his conception of the good, the particulars of his rational plan of life, or even the special features of his psychology such as his aversion to risk or liability to optimism or pessimism. (*Theory of Justice* 118).

The governing notion is that if agents deliberate without respect to their particular interests, they will avoid a crippling bias towards themselves. By entering a state of "mutually disinterested rationality," they achieve a stance free of the inevitable conflicts between conceptions of the good. Though they will have some knowledge of human interests and of the sorts of things humans prefer, Rawls insists that this will be a "thin theory of the good," since it will not be attached to a particular set of goals as more worthy than another (*Theory of Justice* 347-350).

As is perhaps obvious, this is essentially a political reformulation of Kant; Rawls writes that the "veil of ignorance is implicit in Kantian ethics" (*Theory of Justice* 121). He explains further:

> Kant held, I believe, that a person is acting autonomously when the principles of his action are chosen by him as the most adequate possible expression of his nature as a free and equal rational being. The principles he acts upon are not adopted because of his social position or natural endowments, or in view of the particular kind of society in which he lives or the specific things that he happens to want. To act on such principles is to act heteronomously. Now the veil of ignorance deprives the persons in the

> original position of the knowledge that would enable them to choose heteronomous principles (*Theory of Justice* 222).

By dismissing all the knowledge of the particulars that could let us act in our interests rather than on principles that everyone could will, the veil of ignorance ensures that those behind it will be purely rational agents—in a sense, "thin" selves, as opposed to the "thick" selves with particular conceptions of the good and specific social incarnations.

Dickens's narratives, which enact the tension between protagonists who are morally praiseworthy and minor characters with substantive identities who are morally flawed, engages a similar problematic. Dickens does so, however, in an affective register: the bland protagonist does not represent the thin self of pure rational agency, but rather the pure self of moral sentiment. If I am correct about Dickens's sentimentalism, however, he does so for the same basic reason Kant emphasizes rational agency—namely, self-control. For Dickens, we are most ourselves when we are acting on our "natural" feeling, and this gives it its warrant.

At the same time, Dickens also recognized that the stance of pure sentiment could never be occupied, and must remain aspirational: particularly in a modern industrial society, every self would be incarnated in specific social and political relationships. I do not think Dickens ever quite understood how to resolve this issue—that is, how to incorporate moral sentiments into a particular conception of the good. On my reading, these philosophical issues represent a fundamental dynamic Dickens engages, rather than a coherent view he articulates. In this chapter, I will trace two elements of this engagement: his exploration of the temptations of bland agency, in *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*, and his exploration of the way conceptions of the good and practical identities can warp moral sentiment, in *Dombey and Son* and *Great Expectations*.

* * *

Bleak House opens by setting up a dynamic between kinds of conceptions of the good: its structure invites comparison between identities, on the grounds of which self-conception is closer to an expression of moral sentiment. The first such identity is Sir Leicester Dedlock's. We find out that he is made slightly ridiculous by his sense of self-importance: he has a "general opinion that the world might get on without hills, but would be done up without Dedlocks," and would admit "Nature to be a good idea" only "upon its execution by the great country families."[294] Yet, crucially, he does not lack integrity:

> He is a gentleman of strict conscience, disdainful of all littleness and meanness and ready on the shortest notice to die any death you may please to mention rather than give occasion for the least impeachment of his integrity. He is an honorable, obstinate, truthful, high-spirited, intensely prejudiced, perfectly unreasonable man. (21)

There is a mix of humorous criticism and admiration in the narrator's description: Sir Leicester is certainly a man with clear principles that do not permit petty selfishness, but this does not eliminate the more ludicrous parts of his self-conception. The final intermingling of adjectives in the description makes this clear: he is on the one hand "honorable," but then he is "obstinate"; he is "truthful and high-spirited," certainly, but he is finally "intensely prejudiced and perfectly unreasonable."

Lady Dedlock, however, receives neither the admiration nor the criticism. Indeed, the narrator refuses at first to describe her directly, reporting rather on what the "fashionable intelligence" has reported (20). The overwhelming sense here is one of listlessness: Lady Dedlock moves frequently from place to place, finding each "dreary"; furthermore, the

[294] Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (New York: Penguin, 1997 (1853)): 21. Further citations are included parenthetically in the text.

narrator reports that "My Lady Dedlock says she has been 'bored to death'" (20; 21). Notable here first is the way nobility forms a practical identity for Sir Leicester without exactly forming one for Lady Dedlock: there is no sense that Sir Leicester lacks for meaningful activity, while this is the central fact about Lady Dedlock. And the narrator's distance from Lady Dedlock registers this fact; insofar as the narrator refuses to describe fully how Lady Dedlock sees the world while simultaneously affectionately capturing Sir Leicester's conception of the good, the narrator's distance reinforces the value of Sir Leicester's practical identity while denying it to Lady Dedlock.

The identities of these two figures nevertheless present a clear contrast to Mrs. Jellyby's obviously flawed practical identity. The novel significantly goes out of its way to frame Mrs. Jellyby's eccentricity as just that: a detour from the plot has several characters stop at her dwelling for no obvious reason, marking Mrs. Jellyby as abnormal. This abnormality consists in a particular conception of the good: her sense of a valuable life involves only what good she can do for the natives of the African country "Borrioboola-Gha." In distinct contrast to Sir Leicester, this leads her to dismiss her crucial moral duties as a mother: she can "see nothing nearer than Africa." As her daughter Caddy puts the point: "Where's Ma's duty as a parent? All made over to the public and Africa, I suppose!" (65). That it is her philanthropic work which provides meaning to Mrs. Jellyby's life becomes clear in her response to Caddy's declaration that her secretarial work was "drudgery:" she replies, saying, "A mere drudge? If you had any sympathy with the destinies of the human race, it would raise you high above any such idea. But you have none" (381). In this sense, a distinction begins to emerge: Sir Leicester's practical identity is at least partially morally enabling, insofar as his sense of what is valuable leads him to act in genuine moral ways, a fact that the narrator registers in the admirable terms of the initial description. Mrs. Jellyby's

practical identity, on the other hand, is morally crippling: because of her sense of what is valuable, she misses the obligations she does in fact have.

The novel then moves to Mr. Jarndyce's estate, but we do not quite yet get a sense of his own conception of the good; instead, the novel introduces Mr. Skimpole, a "child" friend of Mr. Jarndyce (87). Though he is a grown adult, "in simplicity, and freshness, and enthusiasm, and a fine guileless inaptitude for all worldly affairs, he is a perfect child." In this sense, Skimpole appears first as a man who lacks a practical identity in some crucial way; as with a child, he follows his "simple" desires innocently. He thus does not see himself as the sort of being on whom adult responsibilities obtain. In this sense, the opening chapters of *Bleak House* establish a character system among the minor characters that offers a range of differing practical identities and success at fulfilling moral obligations. Skimpole in some sense represents a limit case, or at least he appears to: his lack of a practical identity presents an opposite of sorts to Mrs. Jellyby, who is consumed by hers.

Against this background, the first solitary scene between the adult Esther and Mr. Jarndyce is a crucial one. Esther becomes emotional with gratitude when Mr. Jarndyce meets with her to explain the Jarndyce case; Mr. Jarndyce's explanation of his decision to become her guardian is revealing: "I hear of a good little orphan girl without a protector, and I take it into my head to be that protector. She grows up, and more than justifies my good opinion, and I remain her guardian and her friend. What is there in all this?" (117). We should note how odd this statement appears when we consider it as an explanation of an action. What reason does Mr. Jarndyce have to be keeping tabs on the orphan girls of London? Why should he take it into his head to be a protector of one of them? Why is protecting little girls valuable to him? What, in short, is the set of values, beliefs, perceptions—in other words, the conception of the good—that generates these reasons for Mr. Jarndyce? Neither Esther

nor the novel asks these questions; instead, Mr. Jarndyce's explanation is treated as entirely reasonable. This, I want to suggest, is because Mr. Jarndyce lacks the features that could provide an answer.

In this sense, Mr. Jarndyce demonstrates Dickens's temptation to idealize an empty agency, comprised entirely of the expression of moral sentiments. It is suggestive that Mr. Jarndyce cannot explain why he helps Esther: any explanation would have to stem from a discrete set of reasons, which could interpose between his action and the moral feelings for which he is so admirable. This emptiness creates a sort of benevolent disinterestedness: because he is not distracted by duties generated from an idiosyncratic conception of the good, he is more able to serve the good of others. But the fact that it is merely a temptation and not an ideal is made clear by the contrast to Skimpole, who—much more overtly—represents himself as lacking agency, but uses this as a justification for selfish disregard of others.

The rest of the novel develops the contrast between empty agency and more substantive forms of identity. To start with Skimpole, we learn first the extent to which he considers his practical identity to have granted him absolution from moral obligations. When another character asks Skimpole whether "there is such a thing as principle," he replies: "Upon my life I have not the least idea! I don't know what it is you call by that name, or where it is, or who possesses it. If you possess it and find it comfortable, I am quite delighted, and congratulate you heartily. But I know nothing about it, I assure you; for I am a mere child, and I lay no claim to it" (294). In this sense, Skimpole denies that he is a creature who can act upon accepted rules; as he puts it later, "I have no Will at all—and no Won't—simply Can't" (495). It becomes clear, however, that this is an act, and that he is in fact

presenting himself as a child in order to escape responsibilities.[295] Significantly, this becomes relevant at the moment when we learn that Skimpole has a family who are constantly impoverished as a result of his refusal to work (677-79).

Additionally, the novel adds analogs to Mrs. Jellyby in the form of other parents whose conceptions of the good lead them to dismiss their duties to their children. The first is Mrs. Pardiggle, who has a similarly ineffective brand of charity: it is her particular prerogative to brag about her children's devotion to various charitable causes by indexing the money they have donated (124). However, the children appear miserable; to Esther, they look "weazen and shriveled," and "absolutely ferocious with discontent." We learn that this is in part because they have not donated money of their own free will; instead, Mrs. Pardiggle pretends to give it to them and then donates it in their name (129). In this sense, Mrs. Pardiggle reveals the way her reflective endorsement of charity has in fact consumed her ability to genuinely perceive moral duties: in her conception of children as moral paragons and her sense of the nobility of these causes, she "unnaturally constrains" her sons (129).

Mr. Turveydrop offers another example of the same problem: his conviction that his life is valuable insofar as he can "exhibit his Deportment" has led him to place crushing demands first on his deceased wife and now on his son, Prince Turveydrop (226). The "Model of Deportment," as Esther calls him, does not work; he instead receives extensive financial support from his family (226-27). Despite this dependence, he is entirely ungrateful, granting himself a luxurious watch his son does not have, and claiming that he is graceful in

[295] This appears in Esther's final conversation with him, where she attempts to criticize him for accepting money from Inspector Bucket to point out where Jo is. Skimpole attempts to explain that he did not accept the money in return for the action, because he has no sense of money as valuable (933). But, as has been hinted virtually every since he first appeared, of course he does have such a sense; this is the only way to explain why he would follow Bucket's instructions. As such, Skimpole's hypocrisy is starkly rendered in this scene, and it concludes the suspicion of his duplicity that has been present ever since he first appeared.

allowing his son and new wife to live with him, when in fact, as Esther puts it, he is actually "quartering himself upon them for the rest of his life" (229; 379).

Interestingly, Esther nevertheless chides herself for criticizing Mr. Turveydrop when she sees Prince Turveydrop and his fiancé Caddy Jellyby willingly pledge to support him. Somewhat surprisingly, she concludes that it is not important for them to recognize Mr. Turveydrop's selfishness:

> [I]f there seemed to be a but a slender chance of her and her husband ever finding out what the model of Deportment really was, why that was all for the best too, and who would wish them to be wiser? I did not wish them to be any wiser, and indeed was half ashamed of not entirely believing in him myself. (385)

There is a hint of irony here, but I think Esther is nevertheless essentially sincere. She is so not, I think, because of any difference between Mr. Turveydrop and the other morally flawed parents in the novel. Rather, it is because Esther recognizes in the innocence and selflessness of Caddy and Prince something akin to her own morally enabling blandness.

This aspect of her identity emerges powerfully in her critique of Mrs. Pardiggle, whom she describes as an "inexorable moral policeman" who "would have got on infinitely better, if she had not such a mechanical way of taking possession of people" (133). Esther describes her own theory of morality, in explaining why she couldn't participate in Mrs. Pardiggle's reforming efforts, thus:

> I was inexperienced in the art of adapting my mind to minds very differently situated, and addressing them from suitable points of view. That I had not that delicate knowledge of the heart which must be essential to such a work. That I had much to learn, myself, before I could teach others, and that I could not confide in my good

> intentions alone. For these reasons I thought it best to be as useful as I could, and to render what kind services I could to those immediately about me, and to try to let that circle of duty gradually and naturally expand itself. (128)

Of course Esther is here explaining why she is incapable of effective charitable labor, but in this explanation we see her view as to what sort of agent one must be to so effectively act: one must be capable of "adapting" to other minds, and effectively addressing them, and as well have a "delicate knowledge of the heart."

There are a number of aspects of the second half of the statement, where Esther famously suggests one ought to let the "circle of duty" expand "gradually and naturally," that one might emphasize. What I want to note here, however, is the way Esther conceives of moral duties in terms of instinct. As I have been arguing, many of the other characters in the novel guide their actions by a practical identity—they believe that something is worthwhile, and organize their lives in such a way as to pursue it. As with Mr. Jarndyce, Esther demonstrates Dickens's tendency to praise the alternative of empty agency: rather than conceptualizing her ethics and determining duties on the basis of those concepts, Esther seems to be living her moral life unreflectively—she will not seek out people to help or try to figure out the best ways to help them; rather, she will simply be as helpful as possible to the people whom she encounters. Even the word "useful" lacks content; Esther (in this passage anyway) is neutral to the projects of the agents she is helping out—she does not evaluate whether a specific project is worth promoting or not, but is indeed simply "as helpful as she can be."

We find an example of the morally enabling ability to perceive other minds, and of the sort of expansion of duty Esther appears to have in mind, in Mr. Jarndyce's behavior at the wedding between Prince Turveydrop and Caddy Jellyby. Esther tells us:

> My guardian, with his sweet temper and his quick perception and his amiable face, made something agreeable even out of the ungenial company. None of them seemed able to talk about anything but his, or her, own one subject, and none of them seemed able to talk about even that, as part of a world in which there was anything else, but my guardian turned it all to the merry encouragement of Caddy, and the honour of the occasion, and brought us through the breakfast nobly. What we should have done without him, I am afraid to think; for, all the company despising the bride and bridegroom, and old Mr. Turveydrop—and old Mr. Turveydrop, in virtue of his Deportment, considering himself vastly superior to all the company—it was a very unpromising case. (483-84)

What I'd like to emphasize here is the "failure on the part of everyone to talk about their subject as part of a world in which there was anything else." If it's clear that "subject" means something like the set of values a conception of the good necessarily includes, then we can see Dickens's real worry about such self-conceptions emerging. To have a substantive and life-informing practical identity is necessarily to see the world in a given way, produced in part by subjective evaluations determined by one's conception of the good, and thus it is to have a difficult time understanding someone whose practical identity is substantively different. It is quite literally to not be able to talk about one's evaluations and beliefs as if there was something else in the world—for it is precisely the case that one's world is constituted by those evaluations and beliefs. Thus, we can see that Mr. Jarndyce's lack of a practical identity, or "subject," is decidedly helpful in negotiating with people who have very clear practical identities; to borrow Esther's terms, it contributes to his ability to imagine "minds very differently situated."

Thus the lack of a practical identity is useful in aiding the fulfillment of one's duties towards others. But of course, the lack of practical identity also means that the possibility of a conflict between moral sentiment and duties created by a practical identity disappears—the sort of conflict Mrs. Jellyby exemplifies simply cannot occur. Part of the reason Esther won't ever fail in her duties towards others while pursuing some other good thing is because there is no other good thing she is pursuing: her identity, like Mr. Jarndyce's, is almost an empty shell that exists for the purpose of working for the benefit of others. Thus, the perfect practical identity again appears as lacking in substance: crucially, it allows for duties to appear "naturally," as core moral sentiments reveal themselves without the barrier of self-conceptions

Now, in between the ideally empty agents Mr. Jarndyce and Esther Summerson and the morally flawed characters—like Mr. Turveydrop—with elaborate conceptions of the good, there are a range of characters who manage to incorporate moral sentiment with a more substantive practical identity. Of course Sir Leicester, who didn't have the moral problems the other eccentric characters demonstrated, suggested the possibility of such an agent at the beginning of the novel. Indeed, the rest of the novel reaffirms his moral value: for instance, we learn that he supports financially his cousin Lady Volumnia and many other family members; as the narrator tells us, "he is a kind and generous man, according to his dignified way, in the cousinship of the Nobodys" (447). And crucially, when he forgives Lady Dedlock despite her secret past, all of the narrator's former humor in the treatment of his practical identity disappears:

> His formal array of words might have at any other time, as it has often had, something ludicrous in it, but at this time it is serious and affecting. His noble

> earnestness, his fidelity, his gallant shielding of her, his generous conquest of his own wrong and his own pride for her sake, are simply honourable, manly, and true (895).

As the plot progresses, moreover, this model of agency appears increasingly valuable as a contrast to the world dominated by the Court of Chancery; this is especially apparent in the final chapter set in Chesney Wold, after the disgrace and death of Lady Dedlock and the enfeeblement of Sir Leicester. The narrator's rhetoric shifts into treating the disintegration of the Dedlock lifestyle as a genuine tragedy; when the narrator recognizes the estate as "somber and motionless," and "in dull repose" without "passion and pride," there is a clear sense of regret for what has happened (985). .

And the novel echoes a key theme from Eliot in a subplot suggesting that a conception of the good might organize one's life in a morally valuable way. All the while that Mr. Jarndyce and Esther are demonstrating its moral benefits, Richard Carstone demonstrates the potentially devastating effects the lack of a practical identity can have. He has some money to find a vocation, but, after training in a variety of successive professions, rejects them all.[296] Instead, he becomes more and more fascinated with the possibility of inheriting money, despite Mr. Jarndyce's warnings not to become so obsessed. This culminates, ultimately, in Richard's death, when it turns out that the estate in question has been consumed by court costs.[297] And the novel further suggests the value of a conception of the good in Allan Woodcourt, who combines the practical identity of a surgeon with the

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[296] Richard tries, at first, the career of a doctor (198). He then gives up his medical training and enters the army (388), until he is forced to leave the army and sell his commission to pay debts incurred in part through his pursuit of the *Jarndyce vs Jarndyce* case (703). His inability to focus on developing a career and sustaining an effort is linked explicitly to the instability in social status caused by his involvement with Chancery by Esther (197); he also understands himself this way (371, 596). Dr. Badger, who was training Richard in his first career, explicitly contrasts Richard's attitude to Allan Woodcourt's; Woodcourt, the doctor notes, takes to the career "from a strong interest in all that it can do" (267).

[297] Upon hearing that the estate is "absorbed in costs" (975), Allan Woodcourt goes immediately to the sick Richard to explain the situation. The reader does not see the moment when Richard actually hears the news, but Woodcourt predicts that it will kill him (975). Richard dies a few pages later (979).

ability to sensitively handle the needs of other agents; as Mr. Jarndyce puts it, he is able to combine "generosity" with a "calm" ambition, which enables a life "of usefulness and good service" (920). Indeed, to the extent that it is possible to integrate moral sentiment with a substantive identity, Woodcourt seems to do so—it may be as a result of this moral achievement that he must remain a minor character, since such integration is so difficult. I take the presence of characters who exemplify the value of conceptions of the good to indicate the extent to which Dickens was working through a way of thinking about the self, rather than conclusively offering one view.

He returns substantially to the comparison of the ethical value of identities in *Little Dorrit*, moving the tension between empty agency and substantive identity into the main plot, in the form of the tension between the empty agency of the protagonists Amy Dorrit and Arthur Clennam and the thick conceptions of the good manifested by the rest of the Dorrit family. Arthur and Amy are famously bland; as Arthur introduces himself:

> 'I have no will. That is to say,' he colored a little, 'next to none that I can put in action now. Trained by main force; broken, not bent; heavily ironed with an object on which I was never consulted, and which was never mine […] what is to be expected from *me* in middle life? Will, purpose hope? All those lights were extinguished before I could sound the words.[298]

Arthur's moral development points to a theme Dickens emphasizes elsewhere—the way ethical and professional education operates as a kind of repression. What is interesting in Arthur's case is that it has given rise to the sort of disinterested benevolence one sees in Mr. Jarndyce and Esther. As will be clear, this is not an accident: the fact that Arthur lacks a clear sense of purpose can be morally enabling.

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[298] Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 1996): 23. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

The narrative confirms the role of moral sentiments in Arthur's life in a subsequent passage:

> He was a dreamer in such wise, because he was a man who had, deep-rooted in his nature, a belief in all the gentle and good things his life had been without […] Bred in coldness and severity, this had rescued him to have a warm and sympathetic heart. Bred in a creed too darkly audacious to pursue, through its process of reserving the making of man in the image of his Creator to the making of his Creator in the image of an erring man, this had rescued him to judge not, and in humility to be merciful, and have hope and charity. (157)

The passage again, crucially, invokes the idea of "nature": "deep rooted" in Arthur is a belief in the possibility of good action. Arthur's possession of a "sympathetic heart" and his capacity to be charitable, merciful, and humble is significantly opposed to the idea of a creed, and more substantially to the peculiar (but perhaps all too familiar) combination of rigid Christianity and capitalistic ruthlessness embodied in Mrs. Clennam.

Amy Dorrit similarly manifests the possession of a moral sentiment that does not stem from and in some ways opposes a clear self-conception; the narrator remarks that she was "inspired to be something" better than the rest of her family, and "to be that something, different and laborious, for the sake of the rest" (71). The emotional nature of this inspiration is clear: it represents the "heart impelled by love and self-devotion to the lowliest work in the lowliest way of life" (71) Significantly, this capacity for moral sentiment does not make Amy in any way less principled; Dickens seems to imagine that moral feelings operate as regularly as principles in governing conduct.

Amy's principled behavior, in fact, represents a significant contrast to the rest of her family, who combine substantive practical identities with the satisfaction of selfish desire such self-conceptions supposedly prevent. In other words, they are hypocrites, and it may be that the constant threat of hypocrisy is what led Dickens to his suspicion of principled conceptions of the good and his championing of forms of empty agency. The clearest example of the way an identity can mislead one in *Little Dorrit* is, of course, William Dorrit himself, who essentially creates the identity "Father of the Marshalsea" to license his selfishness. He depends upon a significant amount of willful blindness and self-deception, complaining about how much Amy goes out from the debtor's prison "to keep up the ceremony and pretense of his having no idea that Amy herself went out by the day to work" (74). Indeed, the Dorrit family combines praise for Amy with a selfish willingness to accept her sacrifices; as Arthur Clennam thinks, "they were lazily habituated to her […] although they had before them, every day, the means of comparison between her and one another and themselves, they regarded her as being in her necessary place" (91). In other words, rather than attaining a perspective outside of themselves, one which would recognize their failings alongside Amy's selfless action, they simply treat her sacrifices as their ordinary due.

Dickens is at pains to show how such selfishness grows out of their conceptions of the good. For instance, Mr. Dorrit offers himself to his brother as an "example" in his willingness to act and maintain habits; he explains that, "At certain stated hours of the day you will find me on the parade, in my room, in the lodge, reading the paper, receiving company, eating and drinking" (212-213). However, such regularity is only possible because "I have impressed upon Amy, during many years, that I must have my meals (for instance) punctually" (213). The point is to show how principled and reflectively endorsed behavior can be in fact deeply immoral; the "Father of the Marshalsea," fairly clearly, would be a

better person if he cared less for his regularity and correspondingly imposed less on his daughter. He uses this identity, moreover, to manipulate Amy into pitying him; after putting her into an awkward situation by letting a suitor know where she will be alone—an act that gives him a "touch of shame"—he draws on his self-conception to elicit sympathy (218). Thus he soliloquizes Amy:

> And yet I have some respect here. I have made some stand against it. I am not quite trodden down. Go out and ask who is the chief person in the place. They'll tell you it's your father. Go out and ask who is never trifled with, and who is always treated with some delicacy […] Amy! Amy! Is your father so universally despised? Is there nothing to redeem him? Will you have nothing to remember him by but his ruin and decay? Will you be able to have no affection for him when he is gone, poor castaway, gone?' He burst into tears of maudlin pity for himself, and at length suffering her to embrace him and take charge of him, let his grey head rest against her cheek, and bewailed his wretchedness. (217-18)

Again, the narrator is at pains to show how Mr. Dorrit's belief in himself, his clear and substantive reflection on the kind of person he is and the kind of projects he ought to be engaged in, is morally crippling: he manipulates Amy into forgetting about his shameful action by waxing eloquent on his own problems. The narrator's scathing dismissal of this as "maudlin pity for himself" captures precisely the real selfishness motivating him—indeed, the narrator goes on to say that "no other person upon earth, save herself, could have been so unmindful of her wants" (219).

Amy Dorrit's brother and sister manifest essentially the same failing. Tip respects Amy, we are told, but the feeling "had never induced him […] to put himself to any restraint

or inconvenience on her account" (221). It is here that the narrator first names the peculiar sort of hypocritical selfishness the Dorrits manifest: it is the "Marshalsea taint." Fanny Dorrit, like her father, is taken by a sense of the Dorrit family's (supposedly) high social status, accusing Amy of lacking "becoming pride" and having "no sense of decency" (349). In such moments, Fanny condemns Amy for obviously moral actions; Amy lacks pride because she thinks it is a mistake to manipulate money out of Mrs. Merdle, and her lack of decency appears in assistance to an old man.

In the second half of the novel, after the Dorrit family has left the Marshalsea prison with newfound wealth, the novel develops a further terminology for the sorts of conceptions of the good that impede on the expression of moral sentiment. It is revealing: rather than Eliot's vocations, to gain reflective control of one's behavior is to acquire a "surface." Mrs. General, the Dorrit tutor in refinement, explains:

> If Miss Amy Dorrit will direct her own attention to, and will accept of my poor assistance in, the formation of a surface, Mr. Dorrit will have no further cause of anxiety. May I take this opportunity of remarking, as an instance in point, that it is scarcely delicate to look at vagrants with the attention which I have seen bestowed upon them by a very dear young friend of mine? They should not be looked at. Nothing disagreeable should ever be looked at. Apart from such a habit standing in the way of that graceful equanimity of surface which is so expressive of good breeding, it hardly seems compatible with refinement of mind. A truly refined mind will seem to be ignorant of the existence of anything that is not perfectly proper, placid, and pleasant' (451).

The metaphor points directly to Dickens's theory of the self. The "refinement of mind" characteristic of an agent with a clear sense of herself comes about through the "formation

of a surface." What the surface is on, it seems to me, is an agent's instinctive moral reactions; Mrs. General indeed brings this point home by emphasizing that Amy should not be reacting to poor vagrants as she "directs her attention" to self-development.

Predictably, Fanny succeeds admirably at forming a surface while Amy fails. Crucially, this is despite the fact that Amy tries to let herself "be varnished by Mrs. General" (476). The process tellingly leaves her "anxious and ill at ease"; the moral sentiments Amy embodies cannot be so easily repressed. The relations with the rest of the family, however, are more malleable; "the wholesale amount of Prunes and Prism which Mrs. General infused into the family life," we learn, "left but a very small residue of any natural deposit at the bottom of the mixture" (476). Rather than self-control, the imposition of a surface creates artificiality, eliminating the "natural deposit" of emotions.

In the culmination of the marriage plot, which has Amy Dorrit marrying Arthur Clennam, *Little Dorrit* suggests that despite the threat of surfaces, it is possible to overcome such limitations and acheive expression of genuine moral feeling. In this way, the novel aligns with *Bleak House* in suggesting that it is possible, albeit difficult, to incorporate moral sentiment and a practical life. Dickens's *oeuvre* as a whole, however, is less certain of this fact: elsewhere, he is at pains to emphasize not the possibility of such lives, but the tragedy that comes when the incorporation of such sentiment fails.

• * * *

Dombey and Son highlights the difficulties in incorporating feelings with practical activities and a clear self-conception, a theme that appears initially in the fact that the primary articulation of the theory of moral sentiments in the novel is ironic: Mrs. Skewton, Edith Dombey's mother, often proclaims the importance of the "natural." As she puts it at

one point, "what do we live for *but sympathy* […] I would have my world all heart."[299] And at another, she claims that the world "is a false place: full of withering conventionalities, where Nature is but little regarded, and where the music of the heart, and the gushing of the soul, and all that sort of thing, which is so truly poetical, is seldom heard" (403). But all this is undermined by the fact that Mrs. Skewton is in reality an amoral, selfish egoist who has turned her daughter into a tool for her own material advancement, which Dickens's narrator hints at when the character is first introduced:

> "What I want,' drawled Mrs. Skewton, pinching her shriveled throat, 'is heart.' It was frightfully true in one sense, if not in that which she used the phrase. 'What I want, is frankness, confidence, less conventionality, and free play of soul. We are so dreadfully artificial.'
>
> We were, indeed (320).

Here, in the remark that Mrs. Skewton's claim is frightfully true, but not in her meaning of the term, and subsequently in the critical agreement with the claim of artificiality, the narrator undercuts Mrs. Skewton as a proponent of the view she is articulating. Although *Dombey and Son* does not move away from the theory of moral sentiments entirely, by placing it in Mrs. Skewton's mouth, the text takes a certain critical distance from it, suggesting that it is neither straightforward nor easy to recognize and live by the moral feelings at the center of the core sentimental self.

The difficulties involved become clear in the character arc of Mrs. Skewton's daughter, Edith Skewton/Granger/Dombey, who is a widow when the reader first meets her. She has been brought up with the explicit design of marrying a rich man; as she puts it to her mother, "What childhood did you ever leave to me? I was a woman—artful,

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[299] *Dombey and Son*, ed. Andrew Sanders (New York: Penguin Classics, 2002): 324. First published 1848. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

designing, mercenary, laying snares for me—before I knew myself, or you, or even understood the base and wretched aim of every new display I learnt. You gave birth to a woman" (431). She goes on to claim that this has left her with an inability to love: "'Look at me,' she said, 'who have never known what it is to have an honest heart, and love.' (432). What this passage suggests is Dickens's recognition of the fact that the moral sentiments are not always powerful enough to overcome the identity an agent acquires; in other words, a conception of the good can overcome one's core self in a way that prevents its expression.

Several later passages from Edith's narrative emphasize this point. Just before her marriage to Mr. Dombey, the narrator describes her as "a woman with a noble quality yet dwelling in her nature, who was too false to her better self, and too debased and lost, to save herself. She believed that all this was so plain more or less, to all eyes, that she had no resource or power of self-assertion but in pride" (462-63). Crucial here is the explicit description of a better self, which corresponds to the "noble quality" dwelling in Edith's nature. However, Edith has developed so badly that she is incapable of "saving herself," which would presumably involve recognizing and living in accord with the feelings produced by her better self.

Edith, importantly, recognizes her nature; this becomes clear at a moment when her mother, horrified at Edith's refusal to follow her instructions, asks, "What are you, pray, what are you?" Edith's answer is revealing:

> "I have put the question to myself […] more than once when I have been sitting there, and something in the faded likeness of my sex has wandered past outside; and God knows I have met with my reply. Oh mother, mother, if you had but left me to my natural heart when I too was a girl—a younger girl than Florence—how different I might have been! (473).

Let us first note the entirely sincere reference here to Edith's "natural heart": if the portrayal of Mrs. Skewton satirizes the notion of a core moral nature, here the narrative takes it seriously. More broadly, Edith's awareness of her corrupted nature is revealing; this is philosophically significant, for it suggests some features of the way practical identity and moral sentiment work in Dickens's thought. Although the practical identity is reflective, insofar as it consists in part of a conscious awareness of goods worth pursuing—thus Edith is consciously pursuing marriage at her mother's demand—it is not subject to voluntary control. At this moment when Edith reveals her perception of the flaws in her identity, she also reveals her inability to modify them.[300]

This recognition produces a peculiar sort of moral action. Edith recognizes her nature and cannot overcome it; however, she also appears to have some sort of reflective control. An important moment makes this complex element of her agency clear: after marrying Mr. Dombey without affection, and hearing his criticism for her lack of respect for him, she makes a sort of appeal:

> I feel no tenderness towards you; that you know. You would care nothing for it, if I did or could. I know as well that you feel none towards me. But we are linked together; and in the knot that ties us, as I have said, others are bound up [Edith means Florence]. We must both die; we are both connected with the dead already, each by a little child. Let us forbear […] If you will promise to forbear on your part, I will promise to forbear on mine. We are a most unhappy pair, in whom, from different causes, every sentiment that blesses marriage, or justifies it, is rooted out; but in the course of time, some

[300] I am following here the reading of Edith Dombey outlined by Anderson in *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces*. Anderson argues that "Edith lucidly sees herself, but only as determined and false. Her self-knowledge changes nothing—it merely forces her to repeatedly exhibit a 'remarkable air of opposition to herself'" (86).

> friendship, or some fitness for each other, may arise between us. I will try to hope so, if you will make the endeavor too; and I will look forward to a better and happier use of age than I have made of youth or prime. (617)

What Dickens points at here is a peculiar sort of moral action after a developmental failure. Edith cannot be the sort of loving agent she knows she should be, since her relationship with Mr. Dombey has none of the sentiment that "blesses marriage," but she nevertheless reveals a capacity to be something other than a purely selfish and manipulative agent. This leads her to hope for some sort of sympathetic response from Mr. Dombey. Although she recognizes that he is a similarly failed moral agent, she holds out hope that he can move past his nature in this same way she would move past hers—in her terms, they would both "forbear"—to achieve, if not love, at least "some friendship." It is, of course, part of the tragedy of the novel that Mr. Dombey refuses this appeal, in some sense driving Edith away.

The broader social implications of this theory of identity become clear in one of the most famous passages of the novel, where Dickens describes the morally devastating effects of the social conditions of poverty:

> Those who study the physical sciences, and bring them to bear upon the health of Man, tell us that if the noxious particles that rise from vitiated air, were palpable to the sight, we should see them lowering in a dense black cloud above such haunts, and rolling slowly on to corrupt the better portions of a town. But if the moral pestilence that rises with them, and, in the eternal laws of outraged Nature, is inseparable from them, could be made discernible too, how terrible the revelation! Then should we see depravity, impiety, drunkenness […] and a long train of nameless sins against the natural affections and repulsions of mankind, overhanging the devoted spots, and

> creeping on, to blight the innocent and spread contagion among the pure (701).

Here, the causal force behind the corruption of the "natural affections and repulsions of mankind" is much more than just a selfish mother; Dickens is indicting the social conditions of whole towns, which "blight the innocent and spread contagion among the pure." Although I do not have space to take up the issue here, this links Dickens's moral philosophy to his social criticism. What matters for our purposes—understanding the relationship between conceptions of the good and the core sentimental self—is Dickens's view of the various ways such self-conceptions can, so to speak, go wrong, and prevent the expression of the underlying moral self.

This problem becomes the central issue in *Great Expectations*, where the relationship between a practical identity and a core self plays a key role in the development of the protagonist, Pip. The novel is especially significant for my analysis because it shows us the process of identity corruption in development, rather than presenting it as a fact: the reader sees Pip go through the process of acquiring an identity that prevents core self-expression, instead of encountering him after the development is over. Furthermore, in presenting us with a first-person narrative, it crucially shows us this process from, so to speak, the "inside"; that is, from within the phenomenological perspective of the evolving moral agent.

As with *Dombey and Son*, the term *Great Expectations* uses for the aspect of identity I am attempting to describe is "natural"; thus the narrator notes about Herbert Pocket that "his manner seemed very natural. I use the word natural, in the sense of its being unaffected; there was something comic in his distraught way, as though it would have been downright ludicrous but for his own perception that it was very near being so."[301] Indeed, the Pocket

[301] *Great Expectations* (New York: Penguin, 1996): 188. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

family is generally strongly associated with the capacity to be "natural": the narrator tells us of Herbert Pocket, Matthew's son, that "I had never seen any one then, and I have never seen any one since, who more strongly expressed to me, in every look and tone, a natural incapacity to do anything secret and mean" (177). There is of course one sense in which one can read this as just a reference to Herbert's decency—he won't do things that are "secret and mean"—but it's worth noting that this decency is, apparently, "natural."

Pip, at the beginning of the novel, appears similarly "natural," at least in having a distinctive set of moral sentiments. *Great Expectations* shows us his instinctive sense of justice:

> My sister's bringing up had made me sensitive. In the little world in which children have their existence whosoever brings them up, there is nothing so finely perceived and so finely felt as injustice. It may be only small injustice that the child can be exposed to; but the child is small, and its world is small, and its rocking-horse stands as many hands high, according to scale, as a big-boned Irish hunter. Within myself, I had sustained, from my babyhood, a perpetual conflict with injustice. I had known, from the time when I could speak, that my sister, in her capricious and violent coercion, was unjust to me. I had cherished a profound conviction that her bringing me up by hand gave her no right to bring me up by jerks. Through all my punishments, disgraces, fasts, and vigils, and other penitential performances, I had nursed this assurance. (63)

What is crucial here is the way Pip unreflectively distinguishes between elements of his childhood. He doesn't need to rely on a developed moral judgment to recognize the

wrongness of his sister's actions; his instinctive sense of injustice does the discriminating for him.[302]

However, as a result of his early encounters with Miss Havisham and Estella, and subsequently his reception of "great expectations," Pip forms a practical identity that is *not* natural, and which is "affected," in the adult Pip-narrator's sense of the term. We see the creation of this identity early on, when Estella mocks Pip's "coarse hands" and "thick boots." Pip reacts thus: "I had never thought of being ashamed of my hands before; but I began to consider them a very indifferent pair. Her contempt for me was so strong, that it became infectious, and I caught it" (60). The language of the passage metaphorically describes the creation of an "unnatural" practical identity: Estella's contempt is "infectious," and Pip internalizes it, subsequently sharing Estella's conception of what is valuable, under which Pip's own life is not especially admirable.[303]

This becomes even more apparent a few moments later, when Pip has some time to himself:

> I took the opportunity of being alone in the courtyard to look at my coarse hands and my common boots. My opinion of those accessories was not

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[302] A similar idea appears in *David Copperfield*: we find David instinctively reacting against the Murdstones' idea of firmness: "Firmness, I may observe, was the grand quality on which both Mr. and Mrs. Murdstone took their stand. However I might have expressed my comprehension of it at that time, if I had been called upon, I nevertheless did clearly comprehend in my own way, that it was another name for tyranny; and for a certain gloomy, arrogant, devil's humour, that was in them both" (774-777). Here again, we find, a developing moral agent reacting instinctively against an element of his childhood. David is careful to qualify his understanding: he isn't certain how he would have "expressed [his] comprehension," and notes that it was "in [his] own way" that he comprehended it, but nevertheless he decisively senses the wrongness of the Murdstones' attempts to raise him.

[303] I am diverging slightly here from Andrew Miller's reading of this development, though our interpretations share broad strokes. Miller sees this moment, and Pip's narrative generally, as a careful "investigation into the moral psychology of shame" (*Burdens* 181). As with my interpretation, he connects this with Edith Dombey, who represents for Miller "the most extended study of [the] internal division into good and bad selves" (171). What I want to suggest here is that the crucial point isn't much a division as it is an acquisition: Pip acquires a practical identity that does not fit his core self. Thus, there is a split—which I describe below—but it is not between psychic materials that were already present; rather, it is between the self Pip originally had and the one he so disastrously grows into.

> favorable. They had never troubled me before, but they troubled me now, as vulgar appendages. I determined to ask Joe why he had ever taught me to call those picture-cards Jacks, which ought to be called knaves. I wished Joe had been rather more genteelly brought up, and then I should have been so too. (62)

We see here Pip's change in evaluations: he at one point thought his hands and boots were acceptable, but now they are "vulgar appendages." Crucially, this tension leads to Pip's criticism of others as well: he comes to criticize Joe Gargery, his sister's husband and the closest thing Pip has to a father, for his lack of a refined background.

This progression in Pip's development culminates in one of the most famous scenes in the novel. Pip lies to his sister and Mr. Pumblechook about what happened at Miss Havisham's house, inventing a story about a velvet chaise, dogs eating veal cutlets, and a game with "flags." However, he then guiltily confesses his actions to Joe; in the narrator's words,

> [T]hen I told Joe that I felt very miserable, and that I hadn't been able to explain myself to Mrs. Joe and Pumblechook, who were so rude to me, and that there had been a beautiful young lady at Miss Havisham's who was dreadfully proud, and that she had said I was common, and that I knew I was common, and that I wished I was not common, and that the lies had come of it somehow, though I didn't know how. (70)

What we see here is Pip's inchoate recognition of the new practical identity Estella's contempt has created, and the subsequent split within his self: he no longer approves of himself and his world. And indeed, seen this way, it is clear that the narrator is right in some sense to call it "a case of metaphysics" (70).

Now, Joe famously takes "the case altogether out of the realm out of metaphysics" and "by that means vanquish[es] it" (71). This vanquishing consists in Joe's assertion of moral principles: lying is lying, and it is wrong regardless as to why one might do it (72). But crucially, he vanquishes it only in the mind of the reminiscing narrator and not in the mind of the youthful Pip: after the conversation, we learn that, "When I got up to my little room and said my prayers, I did not forget Joe's recommendation, and yet my young mind was in that disturbed and unthankful state, that I thought long after I laid me down, how common Estella would consider Joe, a mere blacksmith" (72). The point here, I take it, is that while the narrator—Pip looking back on his life—can see the value of Joe's advice and how it is a response to the young Pip's dilemma, the young Pip himself remains caught in the new practical identity.

This new self-conception comes to dominate Pip's young life: he becomes "ashamed of home," which, though it "had never been a very pleasant place to me, because of my sister's temper," earned its status since "Joe sanctified it" (106). However, "within a single year all this had changed. Now it was all coarse and common, and I would not have had Miss Havisham and Estella see it on any account" (107). Moreover, he becomes incapable of leading a happy life as a blacksmith's apprentice: as he tells Biddy: "I never shall be comfortable […] unless I can lead a very different sort of life from the life I lead now" (128). It soon becomes clear, however, that he cannot quite be comfortable leading any sort of life. Indeed, we see this at the moment when Mr. Jaggers explains to him the financial support and impetus to be brought up as a gentleman that constitutes his "expectations." After telling Biddy about what has happened, the narrator continues: "I never could have believed it without experience, but as Joe and Biddy became more at their cheerful ease again, I

became quite gloomy. Dissatisfied with my fortune, of course I could not be, but it is possible that I may have been, without quite knowing it, dissatisfied with myself" (144).

This self-dissatisfaction, which prevents Pip from being happy, continues through most of his experience of his expectations:

> When I woke up in the night […] I used to think, with a weariness on my spirits, that I should have been happier and better if I had never seen Miss Havisham's face, and had risen to manhood content to be partners with Joe in the honest old forge. Many a time of an evening, when I sat alone looking at the fire, I thought, after all there was no fire like the forge fire and the kitchen fire at home. (272)

The point here is not that Pip should now forget about Miss Havisham and become a blacksmith, which would make him happier. Rather, the point is that Pip cannot now be happy, either as a blacksmith or a gentleman, since there is a split between his practical identity and the person it evaluates: his instinctive sense that something is not right, that he might be happier elsewhere, is a sign from his "nature," which is at odds with his overt self-conception.

Now Rawls's neo-Kantian view cannot quite explain this feature of the self, but the concept of a core sentimental selfhood allows us to see what it means for an identity to be unnatural. Schechtman's 1950's housewife, whose practical identity leads her to think that she is living a valuable life in submitting to her husband and caring for their family, but who finds herself to be depressed and unhappy while living this life, is instructive here. Her unhappiness, for Schechtman, is the sign of the suppression of a robust inclination from the woman's core self; as she puts it, "The idea, however, is that there is a peculiar kind of frustration, anxiety, and emptiness associated with suppressing one's true nature. This is an unhappiness which, e.g., Nietzsche and Freud portray as stemming not only from the failure

to satisfy desires, but from a denial of one's own nature" (419). Dickens is tracing a similar idea here: Pip is unhappy because he has developed a sense of value that does not permit the expression of certain aspects of his fundamental nature. The frustration of such an expression is what creates the "weariness in his spirits," and it is the wish to avoid this split that makes Pip wish he had never seen Miss Havisham's face.

The plot of the novel registers this discrepancy by revealing that the financial backing for Pip's expectations derives not from Miss Havisham, as Pip has hoped and believed, but instead from the convict Magwitch; this plot movement, which narratively reveals a troubling reality underneath Pip's beliefs about his status as a gentleman, parallels the philosophical problem of a true self that does not accord with one's self-conception. As a number of critics have pointed out, Magwitch represents an extreme of what many Victorian gentlemen felt: namely, that they could not be familiar or involved with the sources of their income without losing their status as gentlemen.[304] In this way, Magwitch presents Pip with the uncomfortable fact of the real source of his money, but in so doing he also reveals the extent to which Pip's entire conception of himself misrepresents the real world.

Now, one way to see this tension philosophically would be to claim that every agent has an intrinsic nature, which they must live in accord with. Resolving this tension narratively, then, would require that Pip try to eliminate his current sense of what is valuable, return to Joe and Biddy, and assume the life of the blacksmith he was at first trained to be. And this is what Pip tries to do: once the Magwitch plot is resolved, Pip's first instinct is to try to ignore the effect the "great expectations" have had on him. Thus, he plans to propose to Biddy and ask her what he ought to do; as he voices it to himself, "Biddy, it shall rest with

[304] Various interpreters have offered this argument; for an early reading along these lines, see Edmund Wilson, "Dickens: The Two Scrooges" in *The Wound and the Bow* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1941). For a cogent discussion of these and other tensions in the concept of the "gentleman," see Robin Gilmour's "Dickens and Great Expectations" in *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1981): 105-148.

you to say whether I shall work at the forge with Joe, or whether I shall try for any different occupation down in this country, or whether we shall go away to a distant place where an opportunity awaits me" (472). But the novel's plot eliminates this sort of resolution: Biddy is already engaged to Joe, preventing Pip from marrying her and resuming his pre-expectations life.

Instead, the resolution of Pip's crisis of identity ultimately involves joining the trading firm Herbert works for, and—at least in one version of the novel's ending—uniting with Estella. This resolution aligns to a certain extent with the trajectory of *Dombey and Son*; after all, despite her recognition of the flaws in her upbringing, Edith Dombey cannot immediately reconstitute herself. This formal point gestures towards two important philosophical issues. First, it is a continuation away from Dickens's earlier optimism about core moral sentiments, as evidenced in *Oliver Twist*: one might say that by the time he wrote *Great Expectations*, Dickens had come to believe that Fagin might be right, and that a core nature could be corrupted in a way that prevented a substantive return. Second, and more importantly, Pip's subsequent actions become examples of how moral agents ought to think of themselves when they have developed badly, and thus suggests Dickens's view about how to reform "unnatural" practical identities.

Much has been written about the revision to the novel's ending; in the final version, Dickens ended by suggesting that Pip and Estella would be married or at least become lifelong companions, whereas the novel originally ended with Estella marrying a "Shropshire doctor" and meeting Pip a final time, revealing that sadness has taught her emotion.[305] But the happier ending for Pip is an only partial way of mitigating the intensity of the problem

[305] I am indebted here to John Kucich's essay, "Action in the Dickens Ending: *Bleak House* and *Great Expectations*. " *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 33 (1978): 88-109. There is as well an excellent bibliography on the two endings in *Great Expections* on "The Victorian Web," at http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/ge/endbib.html.

the novel has depicted: the power of the negative critique remains. The philosophical frame I am establishing is in keeping with this idea; after all, despite his regret, Pip cannot find a way to bring his practical identity and sentimental core self into alignment. Like Edith Dombey, he is left living out a flawed existence.

How are we to understand the nature of this life? It is of course crucial that he expresses deep gratitude towards Joe and Biddy.[306] But perhaps more interesting is the fact that Pip creates a life with Herbert Pocket and his wife; this is a way of reconstituting a new family, now that he cannot live with his old one. This reconstitution is all the more feasible, moreover, because of Pip's financial assistance in securing Herbert a position at a firm; this action, I am tempted to suggest, is an example of the expression of a moral sentiment despite a contradictory practical identity. In this sense, Pip is attempting to reconstitute himself by drawing on the one action he recognizes as moral.[307] But these emotions are not completely subject to voluntary control and reconstitution. In the same way that Edith both recognized her emotional flaws and was trapped by them, in such a way that caused her to be deeply proud while knowing that her emotional reaction was warped, Pip cannot completely escape the effect of his expectations.

* * *

In thus emphasizing the moral importance of human nature and core sentiments over the capacity for rational agency—the source of self-conceptions Dickens dismisses as "artificial," merely "surfaces"—Dickens thus significant rejects key neo-Kantian assumptions about the self. He does, however, while refiguring the crucial Kantian dynamic

[306] After Joe cares for Pip when he falls sick, and surreptitiously pays all of his debts, Pip is both deeply remorseful for his previous behavior and grateful for Joe's actions. This culminates in his insistence that Joe and Biddy formally forgive him (479-80).

[307] Pip goes out of his way to mark his gift on Herbert's behalf as an almost surprising benefit of the "great expectations"; as he puts it, "I did really cry in good earnest when I went to bed, to think that my great expectations had done some good to somebody" (299).

in his own terms: as with Kant, the problem is how to control oneself. It is simply the fact that for Dickens, we are most ourselves when we express our feelings, not when we restrict them. The agreement with Kant that one behaves well so long as one is behaving as oneself creates a new version of the dynamic, traced by Rawls, of a conflict between the thin self of pure rationality and the thick self of a particular conception of the good: for Dickens, the tension is rather between the thin self of pure moral sentiment and the thick self of any incarnation of identity in the world.

Thus there is a sort of unreflective Kantianism in Dickens as well. But I don't wish to under-emphasize the significance of this redefinition of the self; it points to the thread of Victorian moral thought that broadly rejected the Kantian view. The works of the next author I will consider, Anthony Trollope, bring this rejection to full flower. But before I do so, a pause is in order. With Dickens, Meredith, and Eliot offering examples, it is now possible to step back to the methodological questions of the dissertation's broader argument, and speculate on the particular impact of realist form.

Interlude: Narrative Equilibrium and Reflective Equilibrium, or the Virtues and Vices of Clarity

In the introduction to this dissertation, I issued several promissory notes, which suggested that I would return to some of the theoretical questions raised by my account of content formalism. In the first interlude, which dealt with the issue of interpretive frames that draw on philosophical resources, I developed an account of the relationship between literary history and intellectual history. I want now to redeem my second promissory note, which addressed the often-raised question about the philosophical strengths of literary writing. In particular, what I want to suggest is that the models of literary realism require a kind of rigor about folk psychology that has recognizable philosophical value.

* * *

Over the last generation of criticism, literary realism has suffered from a number of attacks. David Lodge summarizes the nature of this attack thus:

> Post-structuralist criticism, especially that which derives from the work of Roland Barthes, has identified the 'classic realist text' as an instrument of ideology, a genre founded on bad faith, on the pretense that bourgeois culture is 'natural,' using the dominance of the authorial voice over all the other discourses in the text to limit meaning in the interests of control, repression, and privilege.[308]

[308] David Lodge, *After Bakhtin* (London: Routledge, 1990): 121-22. I am directed to this passage by Harry Shaw, *Narrating Reality: Austen, Scott, Eliot* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999): 8. I am indebted to Shaw's discussion generally for this introductory passage; further citations to this work are included in the text.

The arguments that underlie this criticism are manifold, but tend to cluster around two main themes. In Harry Shaw's helpful gloss, such thinkers tend to portray "realist representation" as either "naively *transparent*" and/or "malignantly *totalistic*" (9). Under the first worry, critics argue that realist novels attempt to simply and directly present the world as it is, and thereby improperly ignore the complexities introduced by the fact that such representations are linguistically mediated. Under the second worry, critics contend that the realist novel, by treating one account of a given moment in history as accurate, suppresses dissenting or alternate views.

Now, these interpretations have been ably met on a number of grounds. George Levine has argued powerfully against the first criticism that realist novels in fact demonstrate a high degree of self-awareness in their linguistic representations, and are thus quite self-conscious about an epistemological problem they are supposed to be oblivious about.[309] Shaw's own argument presses against the second worry by suggesting that the central realist technique of free indirect discourse offers "a serious and promising attempt to know and depict the other, not to override the other"; this is to say that realist novels avoid totalizing accounts of history by genuinely inhabiting alternate perspectives about the events depicted (121). It seems to me, however, that there are some philosophical virtues to realist aesthetics critics like Levine and Shaw have not quite yet recognized; in particular, the requirements realism imposes on the features of literary characters set important strictures on the ideas such novels subsequently express.

This claim is in some important ways merely a variation on an old way of thinking about the value of the realist novel. In her essay "Literature and Metaphysics," Simone de Beauvoir expressed a version of this view: while philosophical treatises "carry [her] beyond

[309] George Levine, *The Realist Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

terrestrial appearances into the serenity of a timeless heaven," "to open a novel was truly to enter a world, a concrete temporal world, peopled with singular characters and events."[310] Such novels "evoke" the "flesh-and-blood presence" of objects, in a way "irreducible" to the techniques of traditional philosophy (270). The notion here is that by virtue of telling a story instead of merely describing an idea or offering an argument, novels must encounter the real world—the experience of actual, breathing people—in a way that other kinds of texts need not.

As Beauvoir goes on to explain, this idea is at the core of one of the principles of realist aesthetics:

> The novel is endowed with value and dignity only if it constitutes a living discovery for the author as for the reader. It is this requirement that one expresses in a romantic and somewhat irritating manner when one says that the novel must escape its author, that the author must not control his characters, but, on the contrary, they must impose themselves on him […] One does [not] want fictional characters to be fashioned, a priori, out of a heavy reliance on theories, formulas, and labels. One does not want the plot to be a pure machination unfolding mechanically. (271).

The point here is that the author must not use her characters as techniques to express ideas; indeed, she should not even be fully aware of the full plot of her novel, but should instead "discover" it as she engages with her characters. This will require that the story be re-written several times; "as the story unfolds," Beauvoir argues, the author will see "truths appear that were previously unknown to him, questions whose solutions he does not possess […] Thus the novel will appear as an authentic adventure of the mind" (272).

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[310] Simone de Beauvoir, "Literature and Metaphysics." In *Philosophical Writings* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004): 261-278, 269. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

Now, Beauvoir is inclined to see the "adventure of the mind" novels encounter as a sort of intellectual experience not comprehensible as the illustration of a philosophical view: as she puts it, "the demands of the novelistic experiment are not satisfied if one limits oneself to disguising a preconstructed ideological framework in a fictional, more or less shimmering garment […] it will be impossible to introduce these rigid theories into fiction without harming its free development" (272). Beauvoir thus drives a wedge between genuinely valuable literary art and novels that merely illustrate an idea. But I think it is possible to capture something a good deal like the sort of value Beauvoir has in mind while still thinking that great literary texts can illustrate ideas: specifically, I would suggest that Beauvoir has articulated precisely the aesthetic challenge for realist novels that convey intellectual positions: namely, they must do so while still allowing the characters in the novel "freedom."

What does this freedom consist in? We can begin to get a handle on this question by briefly returning to Virginia Woolf's critique of George Meredith. Woolf writes:

> [W]hen philosophy is not consumed in a novel, when we can underline this phrase with a pencil, and cut out that exhortation with a pair of scissors and paste the whole into a system, it is safe to say that there is something wrong with the philosophy or with the novel or with both. Above all, his teaching is too insistent. […] characters in fiction resent [nothing] more. If, they seem to argue, we have been called into existence merely to express Mr. Meredith's views upon the universe, we would rather not exist at all. Thereupon they die; and a novel that is full of dead characters, even though it is also full of profound wisdom and exalted teaching, is not achieving its aim as a novel.[311]

[311] "George Meredith." *The Second Common Reader* (New York: Mariner, 2003), 226.

In the introduction, I noted that this was in some important ways an anti-cognitivist view, but it is worth noting now Woolf's suggestion that the problem could be not that there is something wrong with the novel, but that there is something wrong with the philosophy—or, as she comes to imply with the suggestion that "both" could be wrong, that there is something wrong with the philosophy *because* there is something wrong with the novel. And the way she explains the problem, it seems to me, is via an appeal to plausible characterization: when a character says or does something merely because it facilitates the expression of some view of the author's, the character "dies."

This is to say that the simple version of the arguments from both Woolf and Beauvoir implies that the novelistic goals of depicting living characters and illustrating ideas are mutually exclusive. But a more complex version recognizes that this need not be the case: as Woolf's suggestion about what dead characters look like implies, the challenge is simply to ensure that when characters act or speak in such a way as to illustrate an idea of the author's, they must also be acting in a way that fits plausibly with their own nature. A character can never "merely" be an illustration, for this then fails the standards of realist aesthetics, but nothing about this worry implies that the character cannot "also" be an illustration.

And here I think Beauvoir's notion that the act of writing must change the views of the author is significant: the act of fitting the expression of a view to the way characters might plausibly act is theoretically challenging. The appeal to plausibility here in turn suggests the nature of the theoretical challenge, for such appeals depend not on fully articulated theoretical positions about how persons act, but instead on our common-sense notions about what it is reasonable or unreasonable to expect a given character to do. This is to say, in the terms I have developed thus far, they depend on references to folk psychology.

We can see this perhaps most clearly by turning to the early iterations of realist criticism, which addressed the question by way of a debate about moralistic literature. Ironically, George Meredith's own criticism emphasizes the need for living characters: fiction in his view must not be didactic in "a narrow sense"; rather, the end of a novel must arise "inevitably and convincingly from the initial situation and the given characters."[312] Given that this is the case, a novel is flawed when its characters are in "subjection" to the novelist's "purpose," a fact Meredith explains vis a vis Charles Kingsley's *Of Two Years Ago*:

> [The hero] is a chip of purpose, born two years ago to play the fool with a sweet little woman, blight her and everybody dependent on him, stumble up mountains, fire a frantic pistol at his supposed rival, drink laudanum and die, and point a spasmodic moral. No wonder Mr. Kingsley is constantly pummeling him. Compassion for this puny Frankenstein is out of the question.[313]

Here we have, in the period when the conventions of novelistic realism were forming, as clear an articulation of the need for a novel's characters to do more than merely illustrate a view as Beauvoir or Woolf could hope for: Meredith lambasts Kingsley for turning his central character into a "Frankenstein," whose ultimate purpose is merely to spout a "spasmodic moral."

And of course, this is a version of the common realist notion that novelistic plots should grow out of the natures of the characters depicted. As William Dean Howells puts the point, "the events of a real novel grow slowly and necessarily out of the development of

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[312] Richard Stang, *The Theory of the Novel in England: 1850-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959). Stang acknowledges that Royal Gettmann brings out this aspect of Meredith's thought in his essay "Meredith as a Publisher's Reader," *JEGP* 48 (1949): 54. Throughout this interlude, I am indebted to Stang's discussion as a guide to the primary material from Victorian authors, and have indicated where he directed me to a given primary source.

[313] *Westminster Review* LXVII (April 1857), 609-11. See Stang 39.

its characters."[314] Howells contrasts such "real" novels to the "romanticistic novel," which "attributes motives to people which do not govern real people" (10).[315] Similarly—and famously—Anthony Trollope remarks in his *Autobiography*, "I have always desired to 'hew out some lump of the earth,' and to make men and women walk upon it just as they do walk here among us."[316] Indeed, Trollope uses terms quite similar to Woolf's:

> To make that picture worthy of attention, the canvas should be crowded with real portraits, not of individuals known to the world or to the author, but of created personages impregnated with traits of character which are known. To my thinking, the plot is but the vehicle for all this; and when you have the vehicle without the passengers, a story of mystery in which the agents never spring to life, you have but a wooden show. (124)

Here, Trollope reiterates the secondary nature of plot—it is "but the vehicle" for the characters, who are what really matter about the book; conversely, a novel that does not so ground its plot in its characters will be a "wooden show" because, as in Woolf's analysis, the characters will not "spring to life." But more importantly, he articulates how it is that a character comes to feel like a "real portrait": it is by being "impregnated with traits of character which are known." I have something very much like this is in mind in invoking folk psychology: the realistic effect depends on the conformity between the way agents behave in a story and the semi-articulated theories of agency that "are known" by the readers.

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[314] "Novel-Writing and Novel-Reading: An Impersonal Explanation." In *Howells and James: A Double Billing* (New York: New York Public Library, 1958), 17. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.
[315] Though this is not the place to develop the point, of course one of the most famous descendants of this aesthetic view is in cinematic realism, particularly in the famous "Method acting" style developed by Constantin Stanislavski and Lee Strasberg
[316] *Autobiography of Anthony Trollope*.. Ed. Michael Sadleir et all (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 144.

David Masson, in his important 1859 book *The British Novelists and their Styles*, explains the problem further: the "ordinary run of novels," he argues, display "a Psychology, if the truth must be spoken, such as would not hold good in a world of imaginary cats, not to speak of men—impossible conformations of character; actions determined by motives that could never have determined the like; [and] sudden conversions brought about by logical means of such astounding simplicity that wonder itself is paralyzed in contemplating them."[317] Tellingly, he suggests that novelists should be familiar with "the best speculation of their time." Though what "we want from them is matter of imagination," the "imagination of a well-furnished mind is one thing, and that of a vacuum is another"; indeed, the "desirable arrangement might be either that our novelists were philosophers, or that our philosophers were novelists" (304; 305). What Masson makes clear is a point implicit in Meredith's criticism: namely, that the problem is not limited to novels that attempt merely to illustrate a view. Rather, the problem of didactic fiction is a subspecies of the broader issue with insufficiently realistic narratives, which too often depend for various reasons on an implausible "psychology."

Indeed, as the theory of realist aesthetics developed, the knowledge of psychology took on a foundational role, in additional to its supplementary function. One of the central issues in early criticism of the realist novel was the question of what details and what events merited inclusion in a narrative; as Richard Stang summarizes it, "critics of fiction in both England and France continued to ask the same questions: can—or should—the novelist give an exact transcript of 'life as it is?' and what is the purpose of this transcript?" (Stang 148). At one extreme was Fitzjames Stephen's view that, essentially, authors should strive to remove themselves entirely from the question: they should pick a single man to represent,

[317] *The British Novelists and Their Styles* (London: Macmillan, 1859): 300-301. See Stang 88.

and then offer a complete "fictitious biography" that contains a fair "representation of life."[318] Other writers pushed against this view by defending "idealist" art, which, in Edward Bulwer's gloss, seeks to convey "general truths" by representing essential aspects of subjectivity through "typical" characters (Stang 154). As Masson explains, such novelists seek the "elemental" or "fundamental feelings, facts and thoughts of the moral world" in the "minuter facts of social experience"; realist details that do not contribute to the expression of the elemental are mere "minutiae" (Masson 305).

As realism matured in figures like Eliot, Meredith, and Henry James, realist aesthetics began to incorporate idealist elements. Initially a firmly committed realist, Eliot came to accept, for example, the notion that novels must involve "the application of ideas to life," in such a way that the ideas are "thoroughly incarnated" by "breathing individual forms."[319] Similarly, Meredith explains that "between realism and idealism there is no natural conflict"; indeed, "the greatest idealists sprang from a school of hard realism," insofar as the ideas they convey derive from a close observation of the real world. In his telling metaphor, "For my part I love and cling to earth, as the one piece of God's handiwork which we possess. I admit that we can refashion, but of earth must be the material" (Stang 168). The thrust here that matters for our purposes is the way quintessentially realist authors came to see themselves as selecting various facts to convey a particular set of claims about essential human nature. What I would suggest is that these claims are folk-psychological in nature: rather than being derived from empirical study or theoretical analysis, the ideas Masson, Eliot, and others have in mind derive essentially from our common-sense psychology. To this extent, folk psychology matters not only for the execution of a realist narrative, since

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[318] Fitzjames Stephen, "The Relation of Novels to Life." *Cambridge Essays* (London: Parker and Son., 1855): 148-192, 178. See Stang 150.
[319] George Eliot, *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954-1978), IV 301. See Stang 166.

characters must act plausibly, but also for its very conception, because it is folk-psychological claims that constitute the elemental truths that turn the realist narrative from a compilation of biographical detail into a work of literary art.[320]

I want to suggest that this relation to folk psychology—first, the creation of characters through the identification of general psychological truths, and second, the requirement that plots conform with folk psychological notions about action, whatever else the author might be doing—has an important philosophical benefit. To see this benefit, we need to say something more about the method of moral philosophy. As I suggested in the introduction, moral philosophy and moral psychology are at their hearts organized reflection on the raw material folk psychology presents to them. Generally speaking, this process happens over time: one moral philosopher puts forward a view, an interlocutor demonstrates that it depends in some fashion on a claim that violates a powerful folk-psychological intuition, and the view is revised to accommodate it.[321]

Now, from the perspective of the original figure, it's difficult to see how this could proceed differently. After all, there's no clear way, in formulating an initial view, to ensure that one is accounting for all relevant intuitions. Indeed, it's not clear how one might even

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[320] One might object that the "elemental truths" Masson has in mind, as well as Bulwer's "typical characters," are significantly broader than particular claims in folk psychology—that is, the fundamental character of Don Quijote, one of Bulwer's examples, cannot be reduced in any straightforward way to a folk-psychological claim. I think this is an important objection, and shall have more to say about it in a moment.

[321] For an instructive example of this process, consider the polemic between H.J. McCloskey and T.L.S. Sprigge (McCloskey 1963, 1965, and 1967; Sprigge 1965). Standard utilitarianism, as articulated by Mill, holds that one ought to make moral decisions by performing the action most likely to produce the most happiness for the most people. McCloskey, following a long strain of objections to utilitarianism based on intuitions about justice, points out that this view commits the utilitarian to holding that it is sometimes justified to punish the innocent. After all, in a trial where the judge is unequivocally convinced that the charged man is innocent, but also unequivocally convinced that an "innocent" verdict will have massively damaging social effects – perhaps the public is firmly convinced of the man's guilt, and will riot if he is not found guilty – the judge best maximizes happiness by declaring the man guilty. Thus, McCloskey argues, utilitarianism must be flawed: it deems an action to be morally right when we "know," as a result of a powerful moral intuition, it to be wrong. This gives rise to Sprigge's article, which both criticizes McCloskey's examples as far-fetched, notes the strategy (that McCloskey is relying on the ethical notions of "plain men"), and then reformulates the rule-utilitarianism that McCloskey has been criticizing in favor of act-utilitarianism. McCloskey replies as well, noting the inadequacy of the response, and the process continues.

begin such an accounting procedure, short of simply brainstorming intuitions. However, the realist novel imposes a test by virtue of its form that offers a way out of this dilemma: a narrative that must embody a view in the lives of its characters is forced to consider more than just the arguments one might offer in favor of it. By articulating the view in the form of characters making decisions and engaging in actions, the novel must consider the folk-psychological problems that impose themselves in trying to make such characters be "realistic." And there is every reason to think such a test would force the author to re-think several times the original view; indeed, Simone de Beauvoir's notion that writing a novel carries its author on an "adventure of the mind" suggests precisely this.

What does success look like here? In John Rawls's moral philosophy, a concept he calls "reflective equilibrium" plays a key role: this is the state where our principles are fully aligned with our folk morality—the combination of our moral intuitions and our folk psychology. Realist aesthetics, in requiring the novel that conveys an idea to do something similar (because it must incorporate the relevant folk-psychological notions for its characters' actions) achieves a similar state, one I want to call "narrative equilibrium."

Let me flesh this claim out with a somewhat fuller description of the notion of reflective equilibrium. Norman Daniels, in his summary of the concept, describes it thus: The method of reflective equilibrium consists in working back and forth among our considered judgments (some say our "intuitions") about particular instances or cases, the principles or rules that we believe govern them, and the theoretical considerations, or rules, revising any of these elements wherever necessary in order to achieve an acceptable coherence among these beliefs. The method succeeds and we achieve reflective equilibrium when we arrive at an acceptable coherence among these beliefs. An acceptable coherence

requires that our beliefs not only be consistent with each other (a weak requirement), but that some of our beliefs provide support or provide a best explanation for others.[322] The notion here is that it is quite common for agents to confront situations where they hold certain principles on the one hand, and have powerful specific judgments that conflict with the given principle on the other. To achieve a state of coherence, the agent's beliefs thus must be modified: either the principle must be modified in such way that it accords with the specific judgment, or the particular judgment must be dismissed as ultimately mistaken. Moreover, and this is what the end of Daniels's explanation addresses, coherence requires not merely that the belief and the principle accord with each other, but that they are supportive—the principle straightforwardly yields the judgment, for instance, and the judgment offers a clear instance of the correctness of the principle. This is the state of "reflective equilibrium."

I have been speaking in a somewhat abstract way because, although it is perhaps most famous in Rawls's moral philosophy, the method is not intrinsically limited to ethical thought—indeed, Rawls cites Nelson Goodman's 1955 text *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast* as the forerunner of his view. And for his part, Goodman uses reflective equilibrium (without using precisely that name) as a technique in deductive logic: he argues that the formalization of logic requires taking clearly correct chains of deductive reasoning, which serve as the specific judgments, and bringing them into accord with the various general principles of logical validity.

"Narrative equilibrium," then, would involve bringing the ideas expressed in a novel into accord with the realistic depictions of the characters. And just as in Rawls's reflective equilibrium, one should expect both sides to need to give way: sometimes an author adjusts

[322] Norman Daniels, "Reflective Equilibirum." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* (Spring 2011 Edition). Edward N. Zalta (ed.) www.plato.stanford.edu.

her characters to reflect the truth of the theory, and sometimes, crucially—while on the "adventure of the mind" of writing—she changes what she thinks on the basis of what is necessary to allow for a realistic character. Unlike straightforward moral-philosophical texts, however, this is a test imposed not by other critics, but by the aesthetic form itself.

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From a certain skeptical perspective, however, this might seem to be not a strength of realist fiction but a weakness. On the basis of the genealogical critiques of Nietzsche and Foucault, one might reasonably object that it is not clear whether moral intuitions offer useful material at all: they are instead the residue of particular incarnations of power. Moreover, one might suggest—indeed, I think D. A. Miller does suggest—that, in requiring authors to conform to commonsense notions about agency, the realist form reinforces traditional notions of the liberal subject. On his view, this is not—to put it mildly—a strength. Rather, it demonstrates the way the novel functions discursively within contemporary power structures.

Recent work in analytic moral philosophy echoes the skepticism about folk psychology such critics manifest. The "experimental philosophers" have challenged the standard assumptions and methodologies of moral philosophy on a number of grounds by deploying the methods of scientific investigation.[323] Their primary targets have included the empirical plausibility of the concept of "character" central to recent neo-Aristotelian thought and, importantly for our purposes, the moral intuitions and folk-psychological notions that have tended to form the raw material for philosophical reflection.[324] Whether these challenges are fully persuasive, the movement has had the ancillary benefit of forcing

[323] See Joshua Knobe and Shaun Nichols, "An Experimental Philosophy Manifesto." Available at http://www.dingo.sbs.arizona.edu/~snichols/Papers/Manifesto.pdf

[324] For the critique of neo-Aristotelianism, see John Doris, *Lack of Character* (New York: Cambridge, 2002). I shall have more to say about the critique of moral intuitions in a moment.

thinkers to return to basic methodological questions, and ask what exactly constitutes moral philosophy.

Two kinds of arguments in this area are particularly damaging to Rawls's methodological technique of reflective equilibrium. The first, exemplified by Joshua Knobe's argument in "The Concept of Intentional Action," points out that it may be a mistake to think reflective equilibrium is even possible.[325] Knobe demonstrates that there is a deep tension in the folk morality understanding of moral responsibility: it posits that agents are not praiseworthy for the unintended positive effects of their actions, but are responsible for their unintended negative effects.[326] The initial problem here is that this distinction runs counter to a principle with a good deal of philosophical weight behind it, which Knobe terms the "invariance principle": the notion that the conditions that make someone responsible for an action do not change from situation to situation.[327] The larger issue, however, is what this suggests about what Kwame Anthony Appiah calls the "deeply heterogeneous" nature of our folk morality. Given the depths of the oppositions, it may be impossible to bring moral judgments into reflective equilibrium.

Moreover, even if they were homogeneous, it is unclear whether such intuitions reflect anything other than arbitrary and contingent social circumstances. Obviously there are a number of arguments that would critique folk morality along these lines, but a particularly straightforward one relies upon a psychological experiment from Jonathan Haidt and Thalia Wheatley, which demonstrated that simple hypnosis could produce powerful

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[325] "The Concept of Intentional Action: A Case Study in the Uses of Folk Psychology." *Philosophical Studies* (2006): 203-231. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

[326] Knobe draws this out through a clever series of scenarios, where a CEO decides to carry out a new, cheaper form of production—in the first scenario, one that helps the environment; in the second, one that harms it (205-206).

[327] See Knobe and John Doris, "Strawsonian Variations: Folk Morality and the Search for a Unified Theory," forthcoming in Doris et al., *The Handbook of Moral Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) for a fuller discussion of this principle.

moral disgust in agents contemplating otherwise neutral scenarios.[328] What is troubling here is the revelation of the complete malleability of our intuitive moral judgments. Far from deriving from any feature of subjectivity that might offer a ground for moral truths, the experiment suggests that moral feelings might result from accidental and contingent associations. Moreover, it is especially problematic that the subjects' responses indicate both a recognition of the lack of a foundation for their evaluation and a willingness to stand by it anyway; one subject explained his judgment by remarking, "I don't know why it's wrong, it just is." This presents a troubling parallel for those thinkers who would rely on similar, supposedly powerful and universal feelings in support of basic principles of fairness and human dignity.[329]

Now this is a profound challenge to the practice of moral philosophy, but upon careful reflection on the nature of the challenge, it becomes clear that the notion of abandoning folk morality entirely is implausible. In turn, the standard methodology of moral philosophy, consisting as it does in reflection upon folk morality, remains after scrutiny the primary tool in ethical thought. First, it is important to recognize the difference between these critiques and broader arguments in favor of the essential relativism of ethical

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[328] Appiah describes the experiment thus: "People were taught under hypnosis to feel disgust—a brief sense of 'a sickening in your stomach'—when they came across an emotionally neutral word such as 'take' or 'often.' Then they were presented with different scenarios. One was [...] about someone whose actions were quite morally untroubling (a student representative who was in charge of scheduling discussions about academic issues, and who tried to choose topics that would appeal to both professors and students). The scenarios came in two versions that were almost identical, except that one version contained the cue word. The researchers found that when their subjects were responding to the versions that had the cue word […] nobody disapproved of [the student-council rep] when he sought to stimulate discussion by trying to pick topics of interest both to students and to professors. What's not to like? But when he 'often' picked such topics, a significant number of people couldn't help disapproving. Asked to explain, they'd write down such comments as: 'It just seems like he's up to something.' One subject fingered him for being a 'popularity-seeking snob'; another wrote, 'It just seems so weird and disgusting.' Even more mordant was the comment, 'I don't know why it's wrong, it just is.'" (86-87)

[329] I am thinking, for instance, of George Kateb's claim in *The Inner Ocean* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) that John Rawls is mistaken in trying to justify human rights, and that he would rather start "from inside a mode of thinking where individuals and their rights are seen as primary," since "the human dignity of each is the rock" (7).

judgments. These experiments do not show that there are no non-relative moral truths; this sort of ontological claim requires a different sort of argument. These arguments are rather epistemological: they show that ordinary moral intuitions are not transparently reliable guides to the nature of such truths. Thus, the task is not to show that moral truths are genuine; the task is rather to show that if they are such things, folk morality is relevant to our understanding of them.[330]

It is worth stressing the fact that there is not a plausible alternative to this methodology for moral philosophy. As Frank Jackson notes, "we must start from somewhere in current folk morality, otherwise we start from somewhere *unintuitive*, and that can hardly be a good place to start from" (115). This is to say that, after all, if one is going to think about ethics rigorously, there is nothing to do besides start from initial feelings about what is worthwhile and not worthwhile, since this is part of what made the question relevant in the first place. And this point can be part of a broader answer to the question, one that notes the fundamental "inescapability of ethics." Presumably, after having abandoned moral intuitions as deeply bankrupt, the ethical skeptic will then nevertheless have to get up and go about his life, deeming in some fashion a project worthy of pursuit: in this sense, the question "how should one live?" and the evaluative concepts agents deploy in addressing it are inescapable.

Appiah makes this point persuasively vis a vis Richard Joyce, who argues, in Appiah's gloss, that "we must steel ourselves to abjure the Matrix-like fiction of morality, distancing ourselves from 'any theory that would render us epistemic slaves to the baby-

[330] This point is brought out persuasively in David Copp's "Experiments, Intuitions, and Methodology in Moral and Political Theory," *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 7. ed. Russ Shafer-Landau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 1-36.

bearing capacity of our ancestors" (186).[331] What does this look like? Joyce explains: "The only honest and dignified course is to acknowledge what the evidence is and our best theorizing indicates and deal with the practical consequences…if uncomfortable truths are out there, we should seek them and face them like adults" (187). Appiah notes that it is not clear how different this is from what agents were doing before: "It's hard to miss: the authority and inescapability of ethics have apparently survived its putative debunking. We are urged to see through the myth of morality in language riddled with "oughts," not to mention appeals to virtues such as honesty, dignity, and valor" (187). Certainly, we ought to be skeptical of our folk morality, and both the empirical investigations of such phenomena and the genealogical critique of moral commonplaces can contribute usefully to that skepticism—particularly in determining which intuitions reflect the influence of accidental and arbitrary (or social and political) phenomena. But when we remember that the first-person perspective will inevitably remain at the end of the skeptical process, then the poverty of the skeptical view emerges, and the necessity of action forces a return to our moral intuitions (123).

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Let me offer, by way of conclusion, a few further thoughts. It is worth mentioning that—even if it is a strength—there are philosophical weaknesses that correspond to the realist novel's use of folk psychology. First, there is a crucial lack of clarity inherent in a successfully realistic depiction of the deliberation of a moral agent, since there are a multiplicity of folk-psychological notions involved. And making too clear the notion a given depiction is meant to indicate necessarily causes a loss of realism; this is part of the "lifelessness" Woolf diagnosed in Meredith. Furthermore—and for a related reason—the

[331] Richard Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006): 219.

folk-psychological notions that underlie the effect of realism become prominent only in their violation: one notices an idea about intention or desire (for example) only when a character behaves in such a way that violates it. When the realist narrative is successful, on the other hand, these notions remain in the background and go unnoticed. This is to say that realist novels that express ideas in moral philosophy through the form of their depiction of characters must be less clear than philosophical texts expressing the same theory of agency. Nor should this be surprising: it seems quite plausible that realist authors proceed not by fleshing out their own theories of psychology, but rather more intuitively, altering a character when she "feels" wrong.

It seems to me that this is one area where literary criticism can be useful. The literary critic interested in moral philosophy and psychology serves a supplementary but necessary role: namely, analyzing and articulating the psychological ideas whose embodiment makes one character feel realistic while another character seems false. It would require, however, a rather different criticism than the kind I have practiced here. As I envision it, it could emerge comparatively; one might bring novelistic depictions of similar ideas together, and consider which novel is more realistic; the goal would then be to specify why it felt so, articulating the psychological claims that give rise to the feel of realism. Such a criticism would also necessarily be philosophically argumentative, rather than interpretive; the point would be to engage the novels as developing particular folk-psychological arguments, bringing out their assumptions about agency by disputing them. This criticism unfortunately runs athwart my goal here, which has been to explicate novelistic thinking for its aesthetic value. But future work along these lines could be rewarding.

Anthony Trollope on Akrasia, Self-Deception, and Ethical Confusion

As a number of critics have noted, Anthony Trollope had a tendency to reuse a particular version of the marriage plot.[332] What Victoria Glendinning calls his "Ur-story" is a version of the romantic triangle: protagonists, usually though not always male, commit to marrying one character, but then find themselves drawn to a second.[333] Trollope varies the specific plot dynamics: sometimes the protagonist will succeed in returning to the first character, sometimes he will abandon his previous commitment, and often complications produce other outcomes.[334] This aesthetic fact leads to a recurring consideration of a particular issue in philosophical psychology; moral philosophers have long been interested in situations where moral agents know what they ought to do but do not do it.[335]

At the most general level, the theoretical problem involved in such states, which philosophers describe as instances of "weakness of the will" or "akrasia," is a question in the

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[332] As Sharon Marcus puts the point, "a typical Trollope novel charts the dilemmas of a heroine who must choose between two or more suitors and arrive at a decision final in both sense: timed to coincide with the novel's end and pronounced with the permanence of a marriage vow." *Between Women: Friendship, Marriage, and Desire in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007): 233. John Dustin goes so far as to divide Trollope's *oevure* into three categories on the basis of their plots: "category B" centers on the young man "who makes an error in moral judgment" and spends the novel dealing with it, and thus includes many of the novels where the romantic triangle appears. "Thematic Alternation in Trollope," *PMLA* 77.3 (June 1962): 280-288, 281.

[333] Victoria Glendinning, *Trollope* (London: Hutchinson, 1992): 135. Further citations included parenthetically in the text. It's perhaps worth noting that for Glendinning, the protagonist in the "Ur-story" is male: the story involves a man committing himself first to a young woman from the country and subsequently becoming attracted to an older, sexually experienced, and cosmopolitan woman. This obviously differs from Marcus's sense that the stereotypical protagonist is a woman choosing between two men. My own sense is that both are right: Trollope returned to essentially the same philosophical dynamic with both iterations of the triangle.

[334] As Glendinning puts it, "There are many variations on the theme" (136).

[335] This is in some ways an extended reflection on a brief comment from Andrew Miller, who—as I pointed out in the preface—notes in passing that Trollope's *Prime Minister* is "a novel much concerned with the weakness of will"(*The Burdens of Perfection*, 77). Though Miller approaches the problem of akrasia from a different sense of the relationship between literature and philosophy than mine, the observation that Trollope is interested in akrasia is deeply insightful, and essential to the readings offered here.

logic of moral psychology: how can agents will something and not will it at the same time?[336] On what one might call the "simple philosophical model," ordinary action proceeds by an agent judging that a given action is worth performing; this decision constitutes an intention and produces an action. Hence it is not immediately clear how akratic action—which occurs somehow *against* an agent's judgment—is possible. Since agents frequently do seem to act against their better judgments, the simple model of intentional action must be inadequate in some way, yet this model is so intuitive that philosophers have often thought that akrasia proper in fact rarely occurs, and that most cases of weakness of will involve a sort of confusion about what one's judgments actually are. For example, the first account of the problem, Plato's discussion in the *Protagoras*, claims axiomatically that "to make for what one believes to be evil" is not in "human nature."[337] When agents appear to do so, they are really confused about what course of action is best; as Amelie Rorty explains, Plato's "account of *akrasia* explains away counterexamples by re-describing them as cases of deception of some sort."[338] In depicting at length characters who cannot bring their romantic actions into accord with their own best judgments about how to act, Trollope reflects extensively on this

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[336] For an excellent introduction to this issue, see Sarah Stroud's entry on "Weakness of Will" in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* available at http://plato.stanford.edu. Interestingly, a recent philosophical debate, stemming from Richard Holton's seminal 1999 essay "Intention and Weakness of Will," hinges on whether the two terms ought to be identified with each other. *Journal of Philosophy* 96.5 (May 1999): (241-262). Holton argues that rather than conceiving of it as action against a judgment, weakness of will should be understood as action against a previous intention: someone who intends to quit smoking manifests weakness of will in smoking, regardless of whether they judge they should not smoke at the moment when they do. In this sense, weakness of will is importantly separable from akrasia proper. Though the distinction is a philosophically significant one that has sparked a rich literature—see, for instance, Alfred Mele's recent reply in *Backsliding: Understanding Weakness of Will* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012)—I do not think it is relevant for Trollope. As this chapter will show, Trollope depicts agents acting against previous intentions and agents acting against judgments with equal ease and fluidity, and does not seem to recognize any significant distinction between the two. As such, while recognizing the current philosophical interest in keeping the terms apart, I will use them interchangeably.

[337] *Protagoras*, 358d. In *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton et al. Trans. Lane Cooper et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

[338] Amelie Rorty, "Plato and Aristotle on Belief, Habit, and 'Akrasia.'" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 7.1 (January 1970), pp 50-61: 54.

issue, utlimately questioning the status of reflective deliberation for the functioning of rationality; Frank Greystock, in *The Eustace Diamonds*, offers a typical example.

There is no doubt in Frank's mind that he loves Lucy Morris more than his cousin Lizzie Eustace; early in the novel, he proposes to Lucy, and refuses as well to give up the engagement even though it is against his material interests.[339] Despite this commitment, however, he continually finds himself violating his own judgment—yet he maintains the recognition of his wrongness all along. After he flirts with and kisses Lizzie Eustace, the narrator notes that "What [Frank] was doing was not only imprudent—but wrong also. He knew that it was so" (256); similarly, he fails to defend Lucy in conversation, while knowing that "such silence was in truth treachery to Lucy" (311); more dramatically, after Lucy makes their engagement public, Frank is at first irritated, but then admits, "the truth is, we are, all of us, treating Lucy very badly" (361). Alongside Frank's own reflections on his nature, Trollope's narrator considers his irrationality at some length. For instance:

> [T]here are human beings who, though of necessity single in body, are dual in character;—in whose breasts not only is evil always fighting against good,—but to whom evil is sometimes horribly, hideously evil, but is sometimes also not hideous at all. […] Such men,—or women,—may hardly, perhaps, debase themselves with the more vulgar vices. They will not be rogues, or thieves, or drunkards,—or, perhaps, liars; but ambition, luxury, self-indulgence, pride, and covetousness will get a hold of them, and in various moods will be to them virtues in lieu of vices. Such a man was Frank Greystock. (199)

Passages like this move from a depiction of akrasia to an analysis of it. Here, Trollope conceives of weakness of will as the product of a sort of Manichean psychological

[339] Anthony Trollope, *The Eustace Diamonds* (New York: Penguin, 1969): 311-12. Hereafter cited in the text.

oscillation: akratic moral agents contain opposing impulses towards good and evil, which alternate in causing the agent's actions. This causation happens not through compulsion, in such a way that the agent recognizes the evil as such but is powerless to overcome it, but rather through a change in beliefs, one akin to that Plato had in mind. Frank's judgements about the good temporarily change: evil changes to "not hideous at all," "ambition, luxury, pride" become "virtues in lieu of vices."

This is to say that Frank is susceptible to a particular sort of self-deception: while he is not a "rogue," his moral judgment is not immune to influences. Significantly, the narrator and novel are deeply interested in the process by which the vices "get ahold" of men like Frank Greystock; in particular, the narrator explains, sexual desire can temporarily lead him astray: "In his very heart Greystock despised [Lizzie]," yet "he loved her after a fashion, and was prone to sit near her, and was fool enough to be flattered by her caresses. When she would lay her hand on his arm, a thrill of pleasure went through him" (627-28). Trollope thus suggests, through Frank's narrative, a particular way of thinking about how actions against best judgments are possible: desire can temporarily reform such judgments. Notably, Frank can recognize the wrongness of his relationship with Lizzie when he is away from her; this shows his judgment correcting itself.[340]

The point here is to not to offer a reading of *The Eustace Diamonds*, but to demonstrate the interpretive usefulness of a concept from moral philosophy. Because of his distinctive versions of the marriage plot, Trollope returns frequently to weak-willed agents like Frank. Recognizing this fact has two key benefits. First, the attention to moral psychology can clarify an interpretive debate about the tension in Trollope's fiction between ethics and psychology; in fact, Trollope is interested in precisely the areas where the two

[340] Interestingly, the peculiar restoration of his best judgment seems to lead him to refuse to commit openly to Lucy, because he admits his relationship with Lizzie.

discourses intertwine. Second and more substantively, the recognition of the role of akrasia in the main romantic plots allows a new dimension of Trollope's art to emerge: his novels contain dozens of depictions of irrational action and self-deception, and these depictions and his narratorial explanations of them complement each other in philosophically revealing ways. In particular, Trollope's works combine to offer a series of arguments against models of rationality that depend on the role of reflective judgment and conscious decision-making. The critical tradition has long recognized that Trollope's novels see ideal ethical deliberation as an instinctive process, suggesting that any substantive ethical principle is incapable of acknowledging the particularities of a given situation.[341] What an attention to irrationality suggests is that Trollope does not hold this view merely because of the inability of such judgment to achieve sufficient nuance; the defense of instinct stems also from a deep worry about the psychology of rational judgment.

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The contemporary critical debate about Trollope's ethics remains indebted to Ruth apRoberts's 1971 book *The Moral Trollope*. The centerpiece of her argument is the contention that Trollope accepted a "situation ethics": a sense of moral evaluation that emphasized sensitivity to situational particulars.[342] She explains:

> Because the novel is the loosest and potentially the longest of literary genres, the most permissive, it can take the shape of the unique case, no matter how involved or ambivalent or paradoxical […] Surely it is this forte of the novel that Trollope makes his own […] Trollope's interest in complex cases is thoroughly and frankly and

[341] This chapter will touch more substantively on this suggestion in a moment, but for a good discussion of the various versions of this argument see "Three Moral Trollopes," the final chapter of Jane Nardin, *Trollope and Victorian Moral Philosophy*.
[342] Ruth apRoberts, *The Moral Trollope* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1971): 52. Hereafter cited in the text.

> insistently ethical. His tender casuistry demands the most careful, detailed consideration of the circumstances, even those of a crime. (42)

Put another way, Trollope's novels depict the inadequacy of the application of general ethical principles to specific situations; by portraying moral problems with the full richness of accumulated detail, Trollope reveals the insensitivity of simple rules to the complexity of human ethical life. Trollope famously refused to define his key moral concept, the "gentleman," suggesting that those who use the term know what it means without being able to articulate it propositionally; this refusal to elaborate straightforward moral claims is what apRoberts tracks.[343] It is in this sense that Trollope is engaged in "casuistry," reflecting on the sub-principles, provisos, and so forth that enable moral agents to attend to situational specificity. Significantly, his refusal of moral generalization makes apRoberts's Trollope almost an ethical skeptic, and certainly a relativist: apRoberts openly contends that "Trollope's own position consists in 'antisystematism,' and claims later that "Trollope's art, his religion, and his philosophy are all demonstrably consistent; and his distinguishing consistency […] can best be thought of as a relativism" (65; 125).

Yet, as James Kincaid has pointed out, for all his ethical sensitivity, there is nevertheless a discernible moral code in Trollope's works. He explains:

> It is true that [Trollope's] novels consistently attack all forms of purism and absolutism, but not generally to establish simple relativism in their place. The standards are all there; they are made more difficult to apply and far more difficult to define; most of all, there is less communal agreement on what they are. But they are

[343] In the autobiography, Trollope considers a man who uses the term in specifying the qualifications for a position, suggesting that "he would be defied to define the term,—and would fail should he attempt to do so. But he would know what he meant." *Autobiography of Anthony Trollope*. Ed Michael Sadleir et al (New York: Oxford World Classics, 2009): 40. Presumably, what Trollope means here is that the definition of a "gentleman" is not susceptible to clear articulation, but is nevertheless real and content-bearing.

> dependent on codes which are not to be defined by situations. The test is whether one has the proper instincts and sensitivity to behave, say, with honesty in an extremely difficult situation, but the definition of honesty is referred to the instincts and sensitivity and to the action, not to the situation. The situation tests; it is not determinant.[344]

Kincaid is thus prepared to grant to apRoberts the claim about casuistry, agreeing that Trollope emphasizes the adjustments moral agents must make to apply general ethical rules to particular situations. However, it does not follow from this emphasis that *everything* is relative to the situation; the principle being applied necessarily depends on "extra-situational" criteria. As in Kincaid's example, the question of how to act "honestly" in a given situation is only meaningful if the word "honesty" has a meaning independent of the description of the situation.[345] For Kincaid, then, Trollope's moral philosophy is concerned with how best to live out a moral code. Rather than relying on the careful deductive application of a general rule like the categorical imperative, Kincaid's Trollope advocates a moral model—the "gentleman"—who instinctively senses how to behave and specifically how to be "honest."[346]

Amanda Anderson has criticized this interpretive strain by pointing out that many of Trollope's most memorable characters become so by virtue of precisely the conflict between

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[344] James Kincaid, *The Novels of Anthony Trollope* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977): 12. Hereafter cited in the text.
[345] Kincaid does not make the point in these terms, but this suggests a powerful objection to any kind of truly "situational" ethics: if all principles for action are truly relative to the specific facts of a given moment, then it becomes unclear in what sense this counts as an "ethics." Surely the notion of ethical evaluation—being able to condemn someone for acting wrongly, or praise them for acting rightly—depends on the ability to compare situations by appealing to common morally relevant features. Onora O'Neill, among others, develops a powerful version of this criticism, arguing that the very notion of ethics requires a reference to non-situational moral criteria; see "The Power of Examples." *Philosophy* 61.235 (January 1986): 5-29.
[346] As he puts it, "Trollope is forced over and over to define his villains as those who might appear to be gentlemen but who lack the first and most basic requirement: an instinctive aversion to a lie" (14).

their own psychological features and the moral code by which they are attempting to live. As she puts it,

> They manifest not exactly integrity but rather a kind of stubbornness or obsession that often shades into perversity. The tense imbrication of morality and psychology, the irreversible mediation of morality by psychology, thus becomes a fundamental narrative interest, and problem, for Trollope. Any account of ethics in Trollope that does not appreciate this fact—as in readings of Trollope as a situation ethicist (Ruth apRoberts) or even as a writer who foregrounds the delicacy required to live within the terms of a code (James Kincaid)—fails to acknowledge the prominent issue of recalcitrant psychologies even, or especially, among the morally favored characters.[347]

Anderson's point is that both apRoberts and Kincaid fail to acknowledge that Trollope's depiction of the difficulties of ethical life is in some significant sense the result of his interest in characters whose psychological makeup inevitably frustrates their moral agency; Anderson goes on to discuss such "recalcitrant psychologies" in the context of modernity. Thus, the problem Trollope is invested in is not so much about how difficult it is to apply moral rules to specific situations—which is in some sense a problem outside the moral agent—but rather about how difficult it is to live according to a moral rule given the stubborn, intractable, and possibly perverse thing that oneself is, which is in some sense a problem inside the moral agent.

Anderson suggests that the focus on psychology supplants a focus on morality: "Trollope is always putting into question the limits of morality by focusing on recalcitrant psychological impulses and on the transformations that psychological habit effects on affirmed principle" (515). As the interpretive use of akrasia suggests, however, it is possible

[347] Amanda Anderson, "Trollope's Modernity." *ELH* 74 (2007), 509-534: 511. Hereafter cited in the text.

to see Trollope's investment in such psychological issues as reflecting the importance of a particular kind of moral problem, rather than a belief about the limited scope of the moral realm: the ethical critic can acknowledge the problem of recalcitrant psychologies by enriching what the term "ethics" means. In this sense, it is possible to follow apRoberts and Kincaid in seeing Trollope as invested in the nuances of ethical life, but follow Anderson in thinking of the problems that ensue as the result of internal, psychological difficulties.

In considering these moral-psychological problems, Trollope's work complements and is complemented by an important minor strain in Victorian moral philosophy.[348] For the most part, the dominant Utilitarian thinkers failed to recognize akrasia as a problem.[349] Relying on the simple model of philosophical agency, they saw it as a necessary truth that agents would reliably pursue whatever end they judged would maximize their own pleasure; thus, moral development hinged not on learning to bring one's actions into accord with one's judgment, but rather developing oneself in such a way that one's pleasures stemmed from moral actions.[350] The notion that an agent might judge that an action maximized happiness for her and then not do it—that is, that she might act akratically—is, in the psychology of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, impossible. But as Jerome Schneewind has noted, the intuitionist moral philosophers—unlike the utilitarians—took as emblematic of morality in general those problems "in which the agent knows what to do but finds it

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[348] It is important to acknowledge that while the mainstream moral philosophy exemplified by the utilitarians generally denied the issue of akrasia, the broader group of intellectuals Stefan Collini has called the Victorian "public moralists" were much more attentive to it. Indeed, it was central to their thought: "The fear was not relativism but weakness of will. For the most part it was not even suggested that the dictates of conscience were obscure or inconsistent, but rather that the required moral effort might not be forthcoming." *Public Moralists*, 100. I am directed to this source by Andrew Miller, *Burdens of Perfection* 55-56.

[349] This chapter will turn in a moment to one interesting exception.

[350] See, for instance, Jeremy Bentham's claim that "Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone […] to determine what we shall do." The notion that an action might maximize an agent's pleasure, yet somehow not be performed, goes unexamined. "Principles of Morals and Legislation," *Utilitarianism and Other Essays*, 65. The notion societies should develop individuals so that their pleasures stem from moral action is central to John Stuart Mill's thought, and in particular constitutes his notion of an "internal sanction" for morality; see "Utilitarianism," *Utilitarianism and Other Essays*.

difficult to bring himself to do it."[351] And the pre-Freudian psychologists who theorized the "morally insane," as well as novelists like Trollope, took as central the issue of self-control, offering sophisticated accounts of moral rationality and the ways it can fail.[352]

Since the Victorian era, Anglo-American moral philosophers—still largely working within the utilitarian tradition—continued to defend the simple model of agency.[353] In the last quarter of the twentieth century, however, such philosophers increasingly recognized the importance of akrasia and irrationality more generally for a full account of moral agency. In particular, a seminal 1970 paper by Donald Davidson reignited the philosophical conversation by spelling out the intuitions behind the simple model of agency and acknowledging the problem akrasia presents to it.[354] The response to Davidson has been rich and varied, and when combined with elements of the minor strains of Victorian morality, it allows an underlying coherence in Trollope's myriad and varied depictions of irrationality to emerge. The akratic protagonist Trollope depicts most often, including Frank Greystock but also the Duke of Omnium and Phineas Finn, manifests a kind of self-deception importantly different from that implied by Davidson's view: rather than holding that such irrationality is a *state*, where an agent both believes and doesn't believe something at the same time, Trollope shows how it is a *process*, whereby the ordinary means by which agents decide on actions and beliefs are misled by desires. When he depicts situations where agents are not

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[351] "Moral Problems and Moral Philosophy in the Victorian Period." *Victorian Studies* 9 (September 1965): 29-46, 33

[352] *Embodied Selves*, the anthology of Victorian psychology compiled by Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth, brings together a number of examples of this tradition. *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts*, 1830-1890 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). See, for instance, J.C. Prichard's explanation that moral insanity involves "a disordered condition of the mind," which "displays itself in a want of self-government, in continual excitement […] in thoughtless and extravagant conduct" (254).

[353] The agenda of twentieth-century moral philosophy was set by G.E. Moore's *Principia Ethica*, which emphasized questions about the precise meaning of ethical terms, in particular the word "good," over questions in the logic of agency. I am not aware of a definitive history of this period of moral philosophy, but Scott Soames's recent history of analytic philosophy contains an extended discussion of Moore's ethics as setting the terms of the subsequent debate. *Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[354] See Stroud, "Weakness of Will."

self-deceived, and act freely against a better judgment of which they are aware, Trollope moreover demonstrates skepticism about the assumption, central to Davidson's view, that judgments carry motivational power: Trollope's depiction of "conscious akrasia," in George Vavasor and Glencora Palliser suggests that the reasonableness of a judgment may have little actual impact on an agent's actions. Finally, and perhaps most profoundly, Trollope questions models of rationality that define reasonable behavior as that which accords with one's judgment. Through "ethically confused" characters like Alice Vavasor, Trollope shows how agents can act irrationally precisely by acting in accord with their best judgment; correspondingly, he indicates that such agents would have been better off acting akratically, trusting recalcitrant impulses. Trollope's fiction accordingly contributes to the debates around akrasia in three ways: he shows how self-deception can easily mislead judgment, how such judgment can fail to motivate even when it is not self-deceived, and finally how even unbiased deliberation can still be mistaken. Taken together, Trollope's depictions of the psychology of irrationality thus concord with his emphasis on casuistry to criticize the assumption that reflective judgment is the primary capacity for moral life, and to support the sophisticated but instinctive moral agency of the gentleman.

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Davidson argued for the possibility of akrasia by distinguishing between three kinds of judgments: "prima facie" judgments, which judge that a given action is preferable over another in the light of some respect; "all things considered" judgments, which judge that a given action is preferable in all respects; and "all out" judgments, which essentially decide to perform a given action. Akrasia is possible, Davidson claims, because of the gap between "all things considered" judgments and "all out" judgments; an agent can conclude that all things considered, it would be best to turn off the television and go to sleep—but then fail to form

the all-out judgment that consists in the actual intention to turn the television. In such situations, on Davidson's model, the agent falls back on some prima facie judgment—perhaps that watching television is better than sleeping with respect to the desire to know what happens on *Mad Men*. Thus, what Davidson calls "the principle of continence," the philosophical core of his account of self-control, depends on connecting "all out" judgments to "all things considered" judgments, and accordingly avoiding the akratic break (41).

Explaining akrasia by appeal to a gap between judgments allows Davidson to preserve the basic theory of agency the simple philosophical model affords: judgments still produce intentions, which cause actions.[355] If these are not exactly separable as mental phenomena, they are nevertheless distinguishable as components of the process of action. The psychological notion at work here is one Davidson calls a "mild form of 'internalism'"; the term refers to the view that an agent's judgments about what is worth pursuing have motivational and thus causal force.[356] In other words, the view holds that the causes of an action are internal to the deliberative process that produces the belief that the action is worth doing: colloquially, what happens in my conscious mind leads to what my body does. This internalist commitment explains why Davidson emphasizes prima facie judgments: even in

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[355] In particular it lets Davidson preserve the following two principles:

> **P1**. If an agent wants to do *a* more than he wants to do *b* and he believes himself free to do either *a* or *b*, then he will intentionally do *a* if he does either *a* or *b* intentionally.
>
> **P2**. If an agent judges that it would be better to do *a* than to do *b*, then he wants to do *a* more than he wants to do *b*. (23)

The controversial claim here is P2, which links an agent's judgments to her actual motivations. By introducing the concept of "prima facie" judgments, Davidson preserves P2: even the akratic agent judges in some respect that *a* is better than *b*; he simply avoids recognizing that *b* is better than *a* when considering all respects.

[356] This term is regrettably loaded in ways that obfuscate the debate to the non-specialist. As used in contemporary moral philosophy, "internalism" and "externalism" denote two ends of a continuum of views of the motivational force of an agent's judgments—the internalist holding that a judgment is powerfully motivating, while the externalist sees such judgments as only weakly so. Both ends of the continuum are equally unattractive: as this essay will suggest, akrasia presents a powerful argument against strong internalism, but it is worth keeping in mind that judgments must have *some* motivational power, or ordinary action becomes inexplicable. Thus, much of the philosophical literature concerns the "defeasibility" of judgments, and how best to understand it. This literature is vast, but for an important study that sets out a number of the terms of the debate, see Stephen Darwall, *Impartial Reason* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983). Despite its difficulty, the debate is an important one for understanding Trollope: as this essay will show, at the center of Trollope's thought is the notion that a moral judgment has very little causal impact on an agent's actions.

cases of akratic action, there is a judgment that produces the movement of the agent's body; the judgment just does not happen to be the agent's "all things considered" judgment. This solution comes, however, at a philosophical cost: in claiming that actions can sometimes stem from a partial judgment not representative of the full deliberative process, Davidson imagines the self as divisible, so that there are moments when "part" of a moral agent acts rather than the whole agent. This "partitioning of the mind" is implausible, Davidson's critics have argued, for it posits the existence of "semi-autonomous structures" within the mind that can serve as "mental causes for other mental states" without being "reasons": this is to say that they can somehow cause action without being constitutive of full judgment.[357]

It is possible to see more clearly the problem here by extending Davidson's analysis to self-deception, where he defended a similar strategy.[358] One way to make sense of the peculiar state where an agent appears to both know and not to know a given thing—say, that their spouse is faithful—is to claim that this is in fact precisely what is going on: there is a "part" of the agent that knows the spouse is faithful, while the rest of the agent believes that the spouse is not.[359] This is to see self-deception as structurally analogous to interpersonal deception: the deceiver and the deceived are separate agents. But surely, the critique goes, this is implausible: as with the approach to akrasia, this way of addressing the problem posits a number of dubious mental phenomena—sites of knowledge that exist within a person without being constitutive of that person.

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[357] See Alfred Mele, *Irrationality: An Essay on Akrasia, Self-Deception, and Self-Control* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992): 75-76. Hereafter abbreviated *I* and included parenthetically in text.
[358] See Ian Deweese-Boyd's entry on "Self-Deception" in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* for a discussion of Davidson in this light, as well as examples of other thinkers defending a "partitioning" view. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2012 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zaita, www.plato.stanford.edu.
[359] As Mele notes, David Pears has committed the Davidsonian account to just this view by positing a "sub-system" within the mind of the self-deceiver, one "built around the wish for the irrational belief […] although it is a separate centre of agency within the whole person, it is, from its own point of view, entirely rational" (*I* 87).

Alfred Mele among others has suggested an alternate approach, arguing that self-deception and akrasia do not describe states of conflict within an agent's mind, but rather indicate failures in the ways agents arrive at action and form beliefs. Self-deception, from this perspective, is not a split between two contradictory beliefs, but one belief arrived at in an irrational—because motivationally influenced—way.[360] In similar fashion, akrasia is not a state where a tension between a judgment and an action splits an agent, but rather a state where the operation of practical reason has been misled. Mele offers as an explanatory thought experiment in this regard "Gordon," a high-level CIA agent accused of treason.[361] For Gordon's parents, the costs of believing falsely that Gordon is innocent are not much different from a belief based on good evidence, whereas believing falsely that he is guilty will carry a very high cost. This is to say that it does not hurt them if their belief in his innocence is wrong, since his crimes would not affect them; however, if they believe he is guilty and he is not, then they will presumably have ruined their relationship with their son for a bad reason.

Conversely, for the CIA itself, the costs of believing falsely that Gordon is innocent are much higher, while believing falsely that he is guilty does not carry a particularly high price; put simply, they will have given a spy access to state secrets if they improperly believe him innocent, whereas they will simply be out a presumably replaceable employee if they improperly believe him guilty. Thus, their motivation will require Gordon to prove his innocence at a much higher standard of evidence than Gordon's parents require. Self-deception appears, for Mele, in precisely these sorts of features of our belief-acquisition process: even if Gordon is innocent of treason, the CIA may deceive themselves into

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[360] One might object to Mele here by pointing out that more sophisticated accounts of rationality often reject the notion that motivations are always biasing in this way. The end of this essay will draw this objection out.
[361] *Self-Deception Unmasked* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001): 64-65. Hereafter abbreviated *SD* and cited in text.

thinking that he is guilty simply by setting the level of evidence required to prove his innocence impossibly high. Conversely, even if Gordon is guilty, his parents may deceive themselves into thinking he is innocent by setting the level of required evidence extremely low. But in both cases, Mele avoids "partitioning" the self: he does not say that there is a "part" of the CIA that knows Gordon is innocent but wants to believe that he is guilty, and thus persuades the rest; likewise, Gordon's parents are not somehow partially aware of Gordon's guilt and then subsequently persuaded at a conscious level by those parts of their psyches which trust their son.

It is this alternative view to Davidson's that Trollope's representation of self-deception supports, and this particular kind of irrationality—that is, self-deception, as opposed to what this chapter terms "conscious akrasia" or "ethical confusion"—is the most prevalent form of weakness of will in his fiction.[362] The prevalence of such self-deception is suggested perhaps most strikingly by the fact that even Plantagenet Palliser—Trollope's "idea of a perfect gentleman"—succumbs to it (*Autobiography* 361). *The Duke's Children*, typically, opens with a marriage crisis, with Palliser's daughter in love with a man he does not approve.[363] His beloved and now-deceased wife, however, encouraged the relationship behind his back, and thus Palliser (now the Duke of Omnium) irrationally redirects his anger against his wife's best friend, Mrs. Finn, who has advised the young couple. As the narrator explains, he is "driven by the desire of his heart to acquit the wife he had lost of the terrible imprudence, worse than imprudence, of which she was now accused" (38). Wanting his wife

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[362] I am dismissing here an important philosophical tension. Since Plato, philosophers have tended to think that to the extent an agent is self-deceived, she cannot be akratic: that is, if she self-deceivingly leads herself to think a given action is right, she is not akratic in acting against that judgment. Conversely, for akrasia proper to occur, agents must act against a judgment they acknowledge at the moment of action. This is an important distinction in the philosophical conversation, but I am not certain how significant it is for understanding Trollope: in his novels, self-deception and akrasia both occur regularly alongside each other, occasionally within the same character. Thus, I am inclined to suggest he sees the two phenomena as essentially slightly different versions of the same psychological tension, and not as mutually exclusive.

[363] *The Duke's Children* (New York: Oxford World Classics, 1999). Hereafter cited in text.

to have been innocent of manipulating him, the Duke's desire to "acquit" Lady Glencora affects the way he assesses the situation and drives him into self-deception.

Palliser's sort of irrationality does not result from his holding contradictory beliefs (*ala* the Davidsonian account); rather, it stems from motivationally influenced belief formation. Put another way, what Palliser wishes to be true affects how he sees the evidence for and against his beliefs. Trollope's narrator represents the process with some subtlety:

> He struggled gallantly to acquit the memory of his wife. He could best do that by leaning with the full weight of his mind on the presumed iniquity of Mrs. Finn. Had he not known from the first that the woman was an adventuress? And had he not declared to himself over and over again that between such a one and himself there should be no intercourse, no common feeling? He had allowed himself to be talked into an intimacy, to be talked almost into an affection. And this was the result! (49-50).

As the analysis the narrator offers in the first two sentences fades into a passage of free indirect discourse representing Palliser's increasingly self-deceived stream of thoughts, the way that motivation affects the understanding of evidence becomes clear. Rather than remembering his wife's willingness to manipulate love affairs—a fact present to him a moment before this passage—his thoughts re-direct into the irrelevant beginnings of his initial relationship with Mrs. Finn, to whom the old Duke, Plantagenet's father, had in fact proposed marriage at the end of his life. The fact that then-Madame Goesler had declined the proposal is dismissed; for Omnium at this moment, the piece of evidence that rises to consciousness is the accusation of her as an "adventuress."

In thus attending to irrelevant pieces of evidence, the Duke exemplifies self-deception through what Mele calls "error costs," which involve the pain an agent will suffer

if a belief turns out to be false (*SD* 42). If the Duke believes wrongly that his wife is innocent, the mistake is largely harmless—but if he wrongly believes that she is guilty, he will have unfairly condemned the woman he loved. As such, he unreflectively sets the standard of evidence for proof of his wife's guilt extremely high, and the standard for proving Mrs. Finn's guilt much lower: "He had come to entertain an idea that Mrs. Finn had been the great promoter of the sin, and he thought that Tregear [his daughter's lover] had told him that that lady had been concerned with the matter from the beginning. In all this there was a craving in his heart to lessen the amount of culpable responsibility which might seem to attach itself to the wife he had lost" (55). The narrator makes clear that the hope of "lessening" the fault his wife committed affects the Duke's belief formation. Since it would cost him a great deal of suffering to believe that his wife was manipulating him behind his back, the mere assertions from Tregear and Mrs. Finn of his wife's involvement in the affair do not constitute sufficient evidence to prove her guilt. Conversely, the Duke's desires lead to him setting the bar of evidence needed to convict Mrs. Finn of "iniqiuity" and "treachery" quite low. She has briefly interceded with Frank as a mentor, and while her primary advice was for Tregear to confess everything to the Duke, the mere fact of the intercession, along with her past flirtation with the old Duke, becomes sufficient evidence to demonstrate that she is the "great promoter of the sin."

Even after it becomes clear that Mrs. Finn's behavior has been praiseworthy, the Duke somewhat willfully continues to condemn her. As Trollope depicts it, this is again a result of error cost: it would cost the Duke a great deal to believe that he had treated her unfairly. Thus, after receiving a letter from Mrs. Finn accusing the Duke of injustice, he reflects on his behavior:

> He tried to set himself to the task in perfect honesty. He certainly had condemned her. He had condemned her and had no doubt punished her to the extent of his power. And if he could be brought to see that he had done this unjustly, then certainly must he beg her pardon. And when he considered it all, he had to own that her intimacy with his uncle and his wife had not been so much of her seeking as of theirs. It grieved him now that it should have been so, but so it was. And after all this,—after the affectionate surrender of herself to his wife's caprices which the woman had made,—he had turned upon her and driven her away with ignominy. That was all true. As he thought of it he became hot, and was conscious of a quivering feeling round his heart […] If he could make it good to himself that in a matter of such magnitude as the charge of his daughter she had been untrue to him […] Then would his wrath be altogether justified! Then would it have been impossible that he should have done aught else than cast her out! As he thought of this he felt sure that she had betrayed him! (100-101).

The Duke is overtly trying to avoid deceiving himself: he consciously aspires to "perfect honesty" in evaluating his conduct. And he starts well: first recognizing that Mrs. Finn was not really an "adventuress" in becoming acquainted with the Palliser family, and then admitting the deep friendship between her and his wife. And yet a "feeling round his heart rises" when he begins to realize how inappropriate his own conduct has been; "driving" Mrs. Finn away "with ignominy" in his wrath will only be justified if he can "make it good to himself" that she was in fact "untrue." Thus he misleads himself into believing that she was unfaithful; tellingly, the narrator remarks, "as he thought of this, he felt sure she had betrayed him." His sureness here relies not on any piece of evidence, but on how heavily his own need for self-approval depends on Mrs. Finn's betrayal.

In keeping with the gentlemanly ideal that he exemplifies, the Duke eventually overcomes his self-deception, apologizes to Mrs. Finn, and admits his wife's failures. The perception involved in such self-mastery—where an agent frees himself from the biases of desires—is central to Trollope's conception of "honesty." Thus in his writing on Cicero Trollope remarks:

> To be believed because of your truth, and yet to lie; to be trusted for your honesty, and yet to cheat; to have credit for patriotism, and yet to sell your country! The temptations to do this are rarely put before a man plainly, in all their naked ugliness. They certainly were not so presented to Cicero by Caesar and his associates. The bait was held out to him, as it is daily to others, in a form not repellent, with words fitted to deceive and powerful almost to persuade […] But at last [Cicero] saw his way clear to honesty.[364]

Cicero refuses to let his actions be guided by "temptations," masters his motivations, and acts on his own best judgment; in this way he avoids weakness of will. But the more specific problem that Cicero confronts is self-deception. The "bait" does not appear in its "naked ugliness" and is "not repellent," but instead appears in a form "fitted to deceive and powerful almost to persuade"; this is to see it as an influence relying on a disguised appeal to desire, in the same way that the Duke's desire to believe his wife was innocent led him to believe Mrs. Finn was guilty of manipulating the romantic affairs of his children. Thus, it is not so significant that Cicero is open with others; rather, he is admirable in Trollope's gloss because he is finally honest with himself, able to see desires as they are.

The strains of Victorian moral philosophy that recognized and considered akrasia cohere closely with Trollope's depictions of self-deception. Somewhat ironically, one finds a

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[364] *The Life of Cicero* (New York: Kessinger, 2004): 194.

particularly clear expression of this view in the generally utilitarian thought of Henry Sidgwick.[365] Arguing primarily that the philosophical tradition has refused to recognize what he terms "unreasonable action," Sidgwick suggests that weakness of the will most commonly arises from fallacious chains of practical reasoning that the agent momentarily fails to recognize as fallacious:

> [W]hen a general resolution is remembered, while yet the particular conclusion which ought to be drawn is not drawn, the cause of the phenomenon is a temporary perversion of judgment by some seductive feeling […] [given] a hard and distasteful task which he regards it as his duty to do, [a man] then rapidly but sincerely persuades himself that in the present state of his brain some lighter work is just at present more suited to his powers. (255)

Further, when a "seductive feeling" prevents an agent from drawing a particular conclusion that he or she rationally should, the feeling "operates not by producing positively fallacious reasoning, but by directing attention to certain aspects of the subject, and from certain others" (258). Thus, an akratic agent often senses "that he might come to a different view of his position if he resolutely faced certain aspects of it tending to reduce his personal claims; but he consciously refrains from directing attention to them" (259). As in Trollope's account, there is no sense that the man somehow knows and does not know a given belief. Rather, a "seductive" feeling has "perverted" his judgment, self-deceptively convincing him that "some lighter work" is more suitable than the difficult task he initially decided to do.

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[365] Henry Sidgwick, "Unreasonable Action," in *Practical Ethics: A Collection of Addresses and Essays* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1898): 235-260. Further citations are included parenthetically in the text. In particular, Sidgwick writes of the philosophical tradition, "I find that such writers are apt to give an account of voluntary action which--- without expressly denying the existence of what I call subjective irrationality---appears to leave no room for it" (246). Sidgwick's essay represents, so far as I am aware, the only treatment of akrasia within the nineteenth-century utilitarian tradition; in this way, it exemplifies his complex relation to utilitarianism, at once its greatest thinker and its most severe critic. From the perspective of British Idealism,F.H. Bradley's "Can a Man Sin Against Knowledge?" *Mind* 9.34 (April 1884): 286-290, offers a similarly prescient investigation of the problem. I am indebted to Andrew Miller's *Burdens of Perfection* for directing me to these sources.

Moreover, the man's irrationality arises in a way similar to the Duke of Omnium's: his motivations determine the "aspects of the subject" to which he directs "attention," and—as with the Duke's desire to believe well of himself—his "personal claims" lead him astray.[366]

The Small House at Allington exemplifies the way this sort of self-deception plays a constitutive role in Trollope's marriage plots. The novel in fact combines three instances of lovers committed to one partner and drawn to another: Johnny Eames is engaged to Amelia Roper but in love with Lily Dale; Lily Dale becomes engaged to Adolphus Crosbie but is wooed by Johnny Eames; and Adolphus Crosbie, after promising to marry Lily Dale, leaves her for Alexandrina de Courcy. Particularly in the Adolphus Crosbie plot, the narrator shows how self-deception can mislead deliberation: Crosbie's "personal claims," in the form of recalcitrant desires, significantly alter his reflections about whom to marry.

This failure to confront his personal claims emerges first when Lily, sensing inchoately that Crosbie might be regretting their engagement, offers to end the relationship. In one sense this is precisely what Crosbie has hoped for: the amount of money Lily would bring with her upon marriage has disappointed him. But he cannot bring himself to end the relationship: "Then his heart misgave him, and he lacked the courage to extricate himself from his trouble; or, as he afterwards said to himself, he had not the heart to do it."[367] In this moment, Crosbie crucially deceives himself about his own weakness. His desire to think well of himself—to not be the kind of person who would abandon a girl who loved him because she didn't have enough money—alters his understanding of what has happened. As the

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[366] Sidgwick's essay, along with Trollope's remarks in his nonfiction, matter further insofar as they show that an invocation of akrasia is not especially anachronistic. If the particular word and the Greek philosophers who emphasized it were unfamiliar to Trollope, the topic is one he clearly and reflectively engages. If the dominant philosophical discourse did not recognize the problem—indeed, utilitarianism founded itself on the denial that it was a problem—minor strains of Victorian thought very clearly did. In invoking such thinkers alongside contemporary moral philosophers, I hope thus to balance historical and rational reconstruction of Trollope's view.

[367] Anthony Trollope, *The Small House at Allington* (New York: Penguin, 1991): 159. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

narrator describes it elsewhere, "He did not tell himself that he had refused her offer merely because he had not the courage to accept it on the spur of the moment. No. 'He had been too good to the poor girl to take her at her word.' It was thus he argued on the matter within his own breast" (190). Thus, Crosbie re-describes his lack of courage as a kind of strength: he has not been too weak to inflict a little pain in order to prevent a greater one; rather, he has been "too good" to dismiss their real affection, despite the financial difficulties.

Crosbie's self-deception appears subsequently in what will be the turning point of this romantic triangle—his visit to Courcy Castle, in which he breaks his engagement with Lily to propose to Alexandrina de Courcy. Even the visit itself represents a weakness: "It is true, as your heart suggests to you," Trollope's narrator tells his readers, "Under such circumstances Mr Crosbie should not have gone to Courcy Castle" (177). Significantly, Crosbie makes the visit without having worked out precisely what he wants to do concerning his marriage, or without having confronted the desires that lead him away from Lily. This blindness to himself appears when he arrives at the castle and is confronted by the public knowledge of his engagement: he finds himself almost without thinking telling John de Courcy that he is not in fact engaged—that it is "all a lie" (181).

But this encounter forces him to reflect on his desires:

> What was he to do at once, now, this very day, as to his engagement? He had felt sure that the report of it would be carried to Courcy by Lady Julia De Guest, but he had not settled down upon any resolution as to what he would do in consequence. It had not occurred to him that he would immediately be charged with the offence, and called upon to plead guilty or not guilty. He had never for a moment meditated any plea of not guilty, but he was aware of an aversion on his part to declare himself as engaged to Lilian Dale. It seemed that by doing so he would cut himself off at once

> from all pleasure at such houses as Courcy Castle; and, as he argued to himself, why should he not enjoy the little remnant of his bachelor life? As to his denying his engagement to John de Courcy,--that was nothing. Any one would understand that he would be justified in concealing a fact concerning himself from such a one as he. (181)

This passage reveals the way attention to particular features of a situation blinds a moral agent to other features. Crosbie's desire to enjoy Courcy Castle—particularly through flirtation with the de Courcy daughters—creates the "aversion" to declare his engagement publicly. This has not led to an overt resolution to lie about his engagement, and in this way a refusal to deliberate openly about the situation serves the self-deception: again, as Sidgwick suggested, the failure to confront "personal claims" contributes to deliberative error. The beginning of the passage, which makes clear that Crosbie had every reason to expect that the de Courcys would know of his engagement, makes clear the extent to which this is a lapse.

Crosbie subsequently deceives himself first into thinking that Lily would want him to be at Courcy Castle, and subsequently that marrying Alexandrina de Courcy is the most rational thing to do. He lets himself think first that Lily would benefit from the connection to the noble family: "What an advantage would such an alliance confer upon that dear little girl;--for, after all, though the dear little girl's attractions were very great, he could not but admit to himself that she wanted a something […] which some people call style. Lily might certainly learn a great deal from Lady Alexandrina" (185). The extent to which this conclusion is self-deceived justification emerges in the narrator's subsequent remark, "it was this conviction, no doubt, which made him so sedulous in pleasing that lady on the present occasion" (185).

When he does finally decide to break with Lily, his reasons, Trollope makes clear, are the product of motivated reasoning:

> The atmosphere of Courcy Castle had been at work upon him for the last week past. And every word that he had heard, and every word that he had spoken, had tended to destroy all that was good and true within him, and to foster all that was selfish and false. He had said to himself a dozen times during that week that he never could be happy with Lily Dale, and that he never could make her happy […] He had used the old sophistry in his endeavour to teach himself that it was right to do that which he wished to do. Would it not be better for Lily that he should desert her, than marry her against the dictates of his own heart? And if he really did not love her, would he not be committing a greater crime in marrying her than in deserting her? (245)

As the passage suggests, Crosbie's time at Courcy Castle has stimulated his selfishness while suppressing his goodness and honesty. He is not self-consciously cruel; as the narrator explains, "Crosbie was not altogether a villain," and is incapable of being "false with premeditated cruelty to a woman he had sworn to love" (194). But he can be misled into being unintentionally cruel, using "the old sophistry" that lets desires affect the process of moral deliberation and rational justification. Here, in particular, he persuades himself that he really does not love Lily Dale, and that—since undoubtedly she doesn't wish to marry a man who doesn't love her—it would be a "greater crime" to marry her than to desert her.[368]

In this way, Crosbie comes to think that breaking with Lily is really the best way to respect her: "He confessed to himself that he had been very wrong in allowing the outer

[368] This isn't the only argument that convinces Crosbie; similarly, he self-deceivingly emphasizes the practical benefits a marriage with the de Courcy family offers: "Might not the countess help him to this preferment? And if his destiny intended for him the good things of this world,--secretaryships, commissionerships, chairmanships, and such like, would it not be well that he should struggle on in his upward path by such assistance as good connections might give him?" (246).

world to get such a hold upon him that the love of a pure girl like Lily could not suffice for his happiness. But there was the fact, and he found himself unable to contend against it. If by any absolute self-sacrifice he could secure Lily's well-being, he would not hesitate for a moment. But would it be well to sacrifice her as well as himself?" The narrator's representation of self-deceived thinking captures the way it ironically takes the form of a selfless morality. Under the guise of an open and honest "confession" to himself that he has behaved badly, Crosbie licenses his selfishness. By treating his desires to live in the "outer world" as a fact that must be acknowledged rather than overcome, a limited sincerity serves to conceal a greater selfishness. The narrator is not quiet about condemning this sort of dishonesty, asking rhetorically, "How many a false hound of a man has endeavoured to salve his own conscience by such mock humility?" (247).

The novel's tragedy depends on Crosbie's self-deception, as he does not achieve clarity until it is too late, when he is irretrievably committed to Alexandrina de Courcy. After he has realized how painful life with Alexandrina will be, the narrator explains that the life will be all the more painful because of his missed opportunity: "It was in this that Crosbie's failure had been so grievous,--that he had seen and approved the better course, but had chosen for himself to walk in that which was worse. During that week at Courcy Castle,--the week which he passed there immediately after his second visit to Allington,--he had deliberately made up his mind that he was more fit for the bad course than for the good one. The course was now before him, and he had no choice but to walk in it" (400). Strikingly, the passage refuses to excuse Crosbie for his self-deception. Rather than suggesting he was unfortunate in being misled, the narrator here condemns Courcy for "deliberately" choosing the "bad course." It is a slightly confusing way to describe the scene—after all, in the moment of decision, Crosbie seems to have convinced himself that the bad course was

good, rather than reflectively choosing the bad course while recognizing its badness—but perhaps the narrator means to emphasize the extent to which Crosbie is responsible for his own self-deception. Rather than openly confronting his unattractive desires for more money, he let himself be deceived into thinking that abandoning Lily was really the right thing to do.

If *The Duke's Children* and *The Small House at Allington* thus essentially corroborate the account of self-deception as motivated reasoning in Mele and Sidgwick, *Phineas Finn* considers but ultimately rejects Davidson's account of self-deception as a contradiction between internal states. Phineas Finn tries to convince himself that he is in some sense two agents; crucially, however, Trollope presents Phineas's belief not as a lucid account of his actual internal division, but as itself a product of motivated self-deception. In his first eponymous novel, Phineas finds himself after election to Parliament in a series of romantic entanglements—first with Lady Laura Standish, then with Violet Effingham, and finally with Madame Max Goesler.[369] All the while, however—much like Frank Greystock—he is in an implicit way engaged to a woman back home: Mary Flood-Jones, whom Phineas grew up with in Ireland.

> Phineas deals with the tension by imagining that he is two different people:
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> He felt that he had two identities,—that he was, as it were, two separate persons,—and that he could, without any real faithlessness, be very much in love with Violet Effingham in his position of man of fashion and member of Parliament in England, and also warmly attached to dear little Mary Flood-Jones as an Irishman of Killaloe. He was aware, however, that there was a prejudice against such fullness of heart, and, therefore, resolved sternly that it was his duty to be constant to Miss Effingham. (263)

[369] *Phineas Finn: The Irish Member* (New York: Oxford World Classics, 1999). Hereafter cited in text.

And similarly, after giving up his pursuit of Violet Effingham, the reader hears:

> His Irish life, he would tell himself, was a thing quite apart and separate from his life in England. He said not a word about Mary Flood Jones to any of those with whom he lived in London. Why should he, feeling as he did that it would so soon be necessary that he should disappear from among them? (500)

As these passages reveal, Phineas makes sense of himself by partitioning his agency: he has "two separate identities," is "two separate persons," with an "Irish life" quite different from his "life in England." But Trollope's narration clarifies the extent to which Phineas is mistaken in these beliefs about these conflicted states: his mental division represents only what Phineas "would tell himself," what he "feels," and—importantly—what allows him to think that he is not guilty of "faithlessness." Phineas thus evades what Richard Moran has called the responsibility of the authority that arises from bearing a first-personal relation to one's actions: by pretending that the person in Ireland is different from and not in control of the person in England, Phineas avoids having to deal with his own duplicity.[370] And his inchoate recognition of this fact appears in his awareness of the "prejudice against such fullness of heart": the ironic contrast here, between the romantic phrase representing Phineas's own consciousness and the reader's awareness that Phineas is essentially trying to justify infidelity, reveals the extent to which Phineas is fooling himself.

As with Adolphus Crosbie, the primary cause of Phineas's self-deception is his desires: he convinces himself of the possibility of a dual life because this allows him to achieve the multiple sexual relationships he desires. At the point where Phineas has

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[370] This is a central claim in Moran's *Authority and Estrangement: An Essay on Self-Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). See, for instance, Moran's discussion of Jean-Paul Sartre, which includes the observation that one of Sartre's "themes is the thought that the person cannot simply *accept* such a theoretical conclusion [about their likely weakness of will], however empirically well-grounded, without that opening him to the charge of indulging in *acquiescence* in his weakness under cover of being hardheaded and without any illusions about himself" (81). Phineas does something very similar: by implying that his weak will is an inevitable result of his dual lives, he acquiesces to the weakness.

convinced himself that he loves Violet and cannot marry Mary, he yet appears with Mary on a visit back to Ireland. The narrator explains:

> Perhaps there is no position more perilous to a man's honesty than that in which Phineas now found himself […] knowing himself to be quite loved by a girl whom he almost loves himself. Of course he loved Violet […] Phineas was not in love with Mary Flood Jones; but he would have liked to take her in his arms and kiss her […] and did, at the moment, think that it might be possible to have one life in London and another life altogether different at Killaloe. […] He was behaving very ill to her, but he did not mean to behave ill. (369)

The narrator makes explicit the threat to Phineas's "honesty" here, and in fact he does fall into dishonesty, insofar as his desire to flirt with Mary leads him to "think it might be possible" to have a relationship with her and maintain his affection to Violet. He does not, importantly, "mean to behave ill," which is to say that Phineas is not consciously duplicitous, but instead convinces himself that he can somehow respect both her and Violet. But he does in fact behave ill, and does so by convincing himself it is possible for part of him to act without all of him acting.

What Frank Greystock, the Duke of Omnium, Adolphus Crosbie, and Phineas together reveal is the extent to which self-deceived irrationality is a structuring element of Trollope's fiction. Indeed, Phineas's subsequent narrative makes this particularly clear: Mary Flood-Jones, famously, dies before the beginning of *Phineas Redux*. This is to say that the woman to whom Phineas has committed himself, whose marriage with Phineas at the end of *Phineas Finn* represents the triumph of his self-control, immediately disappears from the rest

of the story.[371] Insofar as Mary's death re-opens the possibility of weakness of will in Phineas's romantic life, her death is necessary for Trollope's narrative logic:
a Phineas with fully integrated motivations would not allow Trollope to depict the distortions and deceptions that corrupt his practical reasoning. Early in *Phineas Redux*, the narrator criticizes Phineas, remarking, "In his character there was much of weakness, much of vacillation, perhaps some deficiency of strength." It is precisely because of the philosophical complexities of these failings, however, that the character is of such interest to Trollope (79).

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Alongside these portrayals of self-deception, however, Trollope occasionally depicts conscious akrasia, where an agent recognizes that a given action is a mistake but then performs it anyway. Although the bulk of the novel is concerned with self-deception, the climax of *Phineas Finn* where he resolves his akratic state, points towards a more conscious kind of irrationality. Phineas visits Madame Max Goesler, believing she will propose marriage to him and intending to decline it in order to marry Mary. No longer self-deceived, complete self-mastery still eludes him; he must deliberately remind himself of his commitment to Mary in order to prevent irrational flirtation:

> [T]here was a care about his person which he would have hardly taken had he been quite assured that he simply intended to say good-bye to the lady whom he was about to visit. But if there were any such conscious feeling, he administered to himself an antidote before he left the house. On returning to the sitting-room he went to a little desk from which he took out the letter from Mary which the reader

[371] *Phineas Redux* (New York: Oxford World Classics, 2002): 10. Hereafter cited in text.

has seen, and carefully perused every word of it. "She is the best of them all," he said to himself, as he refolded the letter. (533)

The passage emphasizes first of all the recalcitrance of desire. Despite his overt intentions, Phineas unreflectively dresses attractively for the meeting—in Henry Sidgwick's terms, the desires draw his attention to certain kinds of clothing in a way that warps his ordinary deliberation. Second, and crucially, Phineas here demonstrates what Mele calls self-control as an "ability," after demonstrating over the course of the novel that he lacks it as a "trait."[372] Mele means the distinction to capture the difference between self-control through reflective techniques and self-control as a property of character: for an example, one might think of the difference between agents who get themselves out of bed through a complex series of alarm clocks and agents who get out of bed simply as a result of deciding to wake up at a certain time. The latter "exceptionally resolute" agents have "no need to make an effort of self-control even when faced with strong competing desires" (59).[373] It is because Phineas lacks this kind of resolve that he must consciously work to control himself. Because he knows his judgment may fail to motivate him when the chips are down, in an encounter fraught with temptation he bolsters the motivational strength of his judgment by re-reading a letter from Mary.

This weakness arises from a surprisingly common evaluative instability. Trollope's narrator criticizes Phineas's attempt to bolster himself by judging that Mary is the "best" of the women he might marry, explaining:

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[372] See *Irrationality*, 58.

[373] He explains the naturally resolute agent further: "His commitment to his decisive better judgments is such that his corresponding intentions carry the day without the assistance of skilled, or even brute, resistance […] The agent's ability (or better, power) to counteract motivation that is contrary to his better judgment […] is not the sort of thing that can be actively exercised. Rather it lies simply in the firmness of his intentions. Such a person has no need to see when self-control is called for." (*I* 59).

> I am not sure that it is well that a man should have any large number from whom to select a best; as, in such circumstances, he is so very apt to change his judgment from hour to hour. The qualities which are the most attractive before dinner sometimes become the least so in the evening. (533)

In the offhand remark that a man is "so very apt to change his judgment," this passage expresses a striking skepticism about the stability of character. The fundamentally malleable nature of evaluative judgments emerges moreover in the narrator's registration of how quickly and easily they change, fundamentally altering over the course of a dinner. Thus Phineas's weakness is not merely a result of his lack of resolve, but results more substantively from the weak nature of human judgment: his judgments fail to motivate him, the passage implies, because they are so changeable.

These passages suggest Trollope's rejection of what Davidson called "internalism," the position that judgments are intrinsically motivational. On the opposing "externalist" view, akrasia results from the difference between an "agent's assessments or rankings of the objects of his wants and the motivational force of those wants" (Mele *I* 11). This is to say that self-control is difficult and akrasia common because the connection between judgments and actual motivations is so tenuous: merely judging that an action is worthwhile may have little effect on what an agent actually does. To put the objection in Davidson's terms, akrasia happens not because an agent falls back on a prima facie judgment, but because the motivational power of some other option outweighs the motivational power of an all-things-considered judgment. I do not keep watching *Mad Men* because I fall back on the judgment that it is the better option than going to sleep with respect to some desire, but because that desire is motivationally stronger than my reasons (*I* 54). The point is not that the desire overwhelms such agents, in a way that they are compelled; rather, the claim is that when they

decide to act, their reasons play less of a role in the decision than the motivations created by their desires.

This rejection of internalism appears in a number of different ways in Trollope's works, but *Can You Forgive Her?* is particularly suited to an exploration of the issue, insofar as it brings together a number of conscious akratics, each of whom demonstrates an important difference from the sort of self-deceived irrationality exemplified by the Duke of Omnium.[374] George Vavasor, for instance, approaches self-conscious villainy; at moments, he openly recognizes himself as a "rascal." Upon Alice Vavasor's refusal to embrace him after their engagement, he recognizes that she does not love him, but concludes that he will take her money anyway. The narrator explains: "When Alice contrived as she had done to escape the embrace he was so well justified in asking, he knew the whole truth. He was sore at heart, and very angry withal. He could have readily spurned her from him…[and] would have done so had not his need for her money restrained him. He knew that this was so, and he told himself that he was a rascal" (406). Here, George differs from the self-deceived characters in openly recognizing the wrongness of his actions, yet he does them anyway: his judgment that they are wrong simply fails to motivate him.

Trollope is at pains to explain how George can simultaneously recognize himself as a rascal and yet treat Alice in such a fashion. The narrator remarks:

> Vavasor had educated himself to badness with his eyes open. He had known what was wrong, and had done it, having taught himself to think that bad things were best…[yet he] would sometimes feel tempted to cut his throat and put an end to himself, because he knew that he had taught himself amiss. Again, he would sadly

[374] Anthony Trollope, *Can You Forgive Her?* (New York: Penguin, 1972). Hereafter cited in the text.

> ask himself whether it was yet too late; always, however, answering himself that it was too late. (481)

And, a moment later:

> He believed in his own ability, he believed thoroughly in his own courage; but he did not believe in his own conduct. He feared that he had done,--feared still more strongly that he would be driven to do,--that which would shut men's ears against his words, and would banish him from high places. No man believes in himself who knows himself to be a rascal, however great may be his talent, or however high his pluck. (482)

In George Vavasor, a true separation between evaluations and intentions and emerges: the internalist notion that evaluations have motivational power has become entirely untrue for him. The fact that he knows himself to be a rascal is not sufficient to lead him to change—it is "too late" to do so. One might think that he is self-deceived, in the same way Phineas is; one key line in the passage, which indicates that George "had taught himself to believe that bad things were best," could suggest that George has fooled himself into thing that bad things immoral actions were in fact praiseworthy.

The emphasis, however, is crucially on George's awareness of what he has been doing: he "educated himself to badness with open eyes," and has done wrong things despite the fact that he "had known what was wrong." Then, too the context is revealing: the narrator is comparing George to Mr. Bott, a fellow new Member of Parliament, who—though he "meant to do well," was "born small." The narrator explains further that Mr. Bott "did not know that he was doing amiss in seeking to rise by tuft-hunting and toadying. He was both mean and vain […] [but] was troubled by no idea that he did wrong (480-81). The point here is that Mr. Bott suffers from a garden-variety form of self-deception: he is acting

immorally, but has no awareness of the fact. Given the passage draws a contrast between the two, one must understand George as caught in a much darker state of agency: a state where, due to his self-education in immorality, he is helpless to act from what Trollope calls the "better part of his nature."

If George knows what he does is wrong, and Mr. Bott does not know what he does is wrong, Lady Glencora Palliser knows what she *would* do is wrong. Although situational constraints do not allow Glencora to act on her desires, her impulse to act against her own judgment parallels George Vavasor's. She is drawn to Burgo Fitzgerald and away from her husband in a way she recognizes as wrong but which she is powerless to stop: "I know what I am, and what I am like to become. I loathe myself, and I loathe the thing that I am thinking of. I could have clung to the outside of a man's body, to his very trappings, and loved him ten times better than myself!—ay, even though he had ill-treated me,—if I had been allowed to choose a husband for myself" (306). As with George, Glencora is a conscious akratic: she would have run with away with Burgo, but exterior forces—her husband and her family— have prevented her from acting at all.

But here the distinction between Lady Glencora and George emerges, as we see her deploying self-control as an ability. She alters her circumstances to prevent an elopement by avoiding Burgo socially and enlisting Alice in service of preventing any sort of meeting between her and her ex-lover.[375] As the narrator describes Glencora, "She was as one who, in madness, was resolute to throw herself from a precipice, but to whom some remnant of sanity remained which forced her to seek those who would save her from herself" (453).

[375] There is an interesting interpersonal aspect to this technique of self-control that Trollope depicts elsewhere. For example, the Duke of Omnium eventually recovers from his self-deception about Mrs. Finn by submitting the whole situation to a friend's judgment: inchoately aware that he is no longer capable of objective analysis, that is, he appeals to a moral exemplar. Though it is tangential to my purposes here, one could usefully draw out this component of Trollope's representation of moral weakness in conversation with Andrew Miller's analysis of the importance of second-personal relations to Victorian moral perfection in *Burdens of Perfection* (28).

This is closely related to Phineas's decision to fortify his resolution through the "antidote" of a re-reading of Mary's letter: Glencora's decision to draw on forces outside of herself represents an awareness of the gap between her reasons and her actual motivations. Believing that if she is left to her own devices she will elope, because her love for Burgo will outweigh the motivation arising from a recognition of the act's wrongness, she does not—as George does—let the chips fall where they may, but instead adds additional motivational strength to her reasons.[376] In this way, Glencora and George offer a philosophically significant juxtaposition: if George represents Trollope's awareness of the motivational gap, Glencora represents his suggestion about how moral agents ought to address such a condition.

In suggesting that agents are capable of overcoming their own desires in this way, Trollope points to the complexity of akrasia: though akratic agents are driven by their desires, they are not compelled by them. As Glencora demonstrates, akratic agents are, in a sense that is not immediately clear, free to overcome the desires that move them. Trollope expands upon the tension involved here in *Framley Parsonage*, in the character of Mr. Sowerby. The narrator describes Mr. Sowerby thus:

> That Mr. Sowerby had been a rogue, I cannot deny. It is roguish to lie, and he had been a great liar. It is roguish to make promises which the promiser knows he cannot perform, and such had been Mr. Sowerby's daily practice. It is roguish to live on other men's money, and Mr. Sowerby had long been doing so […] But, for all that, in

[376] This way of putting it elides some of the complexity of this subplot's ending. It turns out that Glencora is wrong about herself: when Burgo does finally meet privately with Glencora and ask her to run away with him, her strength of will hold ups: she rejects him and tells him to go, after calling Alice into the room, without needing any exterior support (697-700). Yet she doesn't understand herself as having acted in a self-controlled fashion, but instead as having *failed* to control herself, in experiencing a moment of cowardice: she explains her rejection of Burgo to Alice by saying, "As for running away with him, I have not courage to do it. I can think of it, scheme for it, wish for it;—but as for doing it, that is beyond me. Mr. Palliser is quite safe" (701). This is an interesting wrinkle, made more complicated by the fact that it is not clear whether the reader should take Glencora at her word, but it does not ultimately affect the claims made in this chapter

> spite of his acknowledged roguery, Lord Lufton was too hard upon him in his judgement. There was yet within him the means of repentance, could a *locus penitentiae* have been supplied to him.[377]

Mr. Sowerby has long been a self-aware rogue who nevertheless recognizes himself as such; however, in the same that George finds it "too late" to change, Sowerby lacks a "locus pentitentiae" that would lead him back to a praiseworthy life.

Crucially, the narrator in *Framley Parsonage* reflects on this sort of thinking, contending that "A man always can do right, even though he has done wrong before. But that previous wrong adds so much difficulty to the path--a difficulty which increases in tremendous ratio, till a man at last is choked in his struggling, and is drowned beneath the waters" (150). The contrast here is compelling. On the one hand, the narrator appears to dismiss the hopelessness George and Sowerby feel as foolish by simply declaring that "a man can always do right"; on the other hand, the comment also lays out why they might feel such hopelessness, since their actions "add difficulty" to the path, until they choke and drown "beneath the waters." The point here is that the capacity to be resolute—that is, self-control as a trait—is a habit, and can disappear if it is consistently overridden. It is always possible to exert self-control as an ability, which involves consciously bringing oneself into accord with a better judgment; this is the assumption that lies behind the narrator's assertion that a "man can always do right." But if a moral agent continually lets desires overwhelm their judgment, such exertions will become increasingly necessary, as he "drowns" in a succession of irresolute, weak-willed actions.

* * *

[377] *Framley Parsonage* (New York: Oxford World Classics, 2002): 531. Hereafter cited in text.

All of the instances of irrationality presented thus far do not quite yet question the role of deliberative judgment within an account of rational behavior. If self-deceived characters demonstrate Trollope's recognition of the ways judgment can be misled and conscious akratics demonstrate his recognition of the ways judgment can fail to motivate, both sorts of moral problem still reinforce the importance of judgment. In other words, failures of corrupted judgment and insufficient motivation both imply that moral action requires freeing one's judgment from bias and bringing one's behavior into accord with it. But the depth of Trollope's reflection on the issue appears in the fact that he also considers what is in some sense the opposite problem. Challenging the assumption that correct judgment is essential to rational behavior, Trollope depicts extended states of "ethical confusion," where a character's sincere, honest, and careful deliberative judgment is nevertheless deeply mistaken. In such moments, he represents feelings and desires not as biases that produce irrationality, but instead sub-reflective guides that point to a moral agent's real reasons. Correspondingly, in such situations a character's rationality does not lie in finding ways to overcome those feelings and act in accord with their best judgment, but in trusting her feelings and acting against that judgment itself.

The suggestion that weakness of the will might be rational represents a powerful challenge to the Davidsonian view. Nomy Arpaly, in her 2000 essay "On Acting Rationally Against One's Best Judgment," points out that one's "all things considered" or best judgment is, after all, just another belief, and can be mistaken in the ways that any other belief can.[378] Arpaly argues that there is no guarantee that reflection, even under ideal circumstances, can never make mistakes. Even if one limits the conception of rationality to what Arpaly calls the "coherence of the agent's mental states," the possibility of reflective

[378] Nomy Arpaly, "On Acting Rationally Against One's Best Judgment." *Ethics* 110.3 (April 2000): 488-513, 512. Further citations termed "Acting Rationally" and included parenthetically in the text.

error remains: the point is that even when the only question is which action best serves an agent's interests, the agent can still err through a sort of subjective irrationality, or confusion about what her interests actually are (496).[379] When caught up in such confusion, Arpaly argues, akrasia is not necessarily irrational. More specifically, given two irrational actions, where one is against an agent's real interests and desires but in accord with her judgment, and the other is against an agent's best judgment but in accord with her real interests and desires, the fact that the latter is akratic is inconsequential, given its deeper reasonableness. In a state of ethical confusion, furthermore, an agent's recalcitrant emotions and instincts—affective states that resist the control of rational judgment—can be guides to her genuine interests or real reasons.[380] Thus akrasia matters less than one might think: agents who act on the basis of recalcitrant emotions might be procedurally irrational, but they are better off than they would be if they insisted on following their judgment.[381]

> To motivate this claim, Arpaly offers the following thought experiment:
>
> Emily's best judgment has always told her that she should pursue a Ph.D. in chemistry. But as she proceeds through a graduate program, she starts feeling restless, sad, and ill motivated to stick to her studies. These feelings are triggered by a variety of factors which, let us suppose, are good reasons for her, given her beliefs and desires, not to be in the program. The kind of research that she is expected to do, for example, does not allow her to fully exercise her talents, she does not possess

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[379] Arpaly explains further that rationality is "not about always finding the optimal outcome but about having a coherent and consistent set of beliefs and desires" (496). In other words, the point is not that such moral agents select less than ideal options, but rather that they act inconsistently with themselves.

[380] There is of course a lengthy theoretical tradition diagnosing states like Alice's: she is, fairly clearly, repressed. While I lack the space to give the psychoanalytic account of repression the treatment it deserves, Gary Jaeger's *Repression, Integrity, and Practical Reasoning* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) usefully draws on the psychoanalytic literature in developing, in the terms of contemporary moral philosophy, an account of the rationality of recalcitrant emotional impulses.

[381] This way of putting it touches on a complex point. Arpaly is not quite prepared to concede that agents would be more procedurally rational if she changed her judgment, since this in some sense a way of re-instantiating the importance of reflective judgment.

> some of the talents that the program requires, and the people who seem most happy in the program are very different from her in their general preferences and character. All these factors she notices and registers, but they are also something that she ignores when she deliberates about the rightness of her choice of vocation […] One day, on an impulse, propelled exclusively by her feelings, she quits the program, calling herself lazy and irrational but also experiencing a (to her) inexplicable sense of relief. Years later, happily working elsewhere, she suddenly sees the reasons for her bad feelings of old, cites them as the reasons for her quitting, and regards as irrationality not her quitting, but rather the fact that she held onto her conviction that the program was right for her as long as she did. (504)

What Emily has experienced, then, is a moment where her best judgment about how to behave has become so systematically mistaken that akratic action against that judgment is more rational than action in accord with it. In other words, she is so blind to herself, so lacking in awareness about her genuine interests and capacities, that despite her careful deliberations deciding to do a Ph.D. in chemistry, she acts incoherently. In this state, her unhappiness and frustration represent instinctive guides to her real interests—for instance, they stem from the fact that her work does not permit her to fully exercise her talents—rather than impulses that she must overcome to act rationally.

In *Can You Forgive Her?*, Alice Vavasor's extensive reflection on whom to marry exemplifies the kind of irrationality Arpaly describes. As Trollope's representation indicates, ethically confused deliberations can be quite sophisticated: indeed, the implication is that their extent and depth are part of the problem. Alice Vavasor's deliberation has led her to vacillation in her choices: she has been engaged to George Vavasor, is engaged to John Grey

at the novel's beginning, returns to George, and then ends the novel by marrying John. The narrator criticizes Alice's deliberations thus:

> That Alice Vavasor had thought too much about it, I feel quite sure […] She had gone on thinking of the matter till her mind had become filled with some undefined idea of the importance to her of her own life […] If [a woman] shall have recognized the necessity of truth and honesty for the purposes of her life, I do not know that she need ask herself many questions as to what she will do with it. Alice Vavasor was ever asking herself that question, and had by degrees filled herself with a vague idea that there was a something to be done; a something over and beyond, or perhaps altogether beside that marrying and having two children;—if she only knew what it was. She had filled herself, or had been filled by her cousins, with an undefined ambition that made her restless without giving her any real food for her mind. (140-41)

The point here is that Alice's extensive reflections on what to do with her life have come to mislead her: she has created a "vague idea" that a life spent in married domesticity is somehow inadequate. This undefined ambition is, the narrator makes clear, irrational: not only does it not offer "food for her mind," which would presumably take the shape of definite projects to pursue, but it may result from the manipulations of her cousins George and Kate Vavasor. Trollope's alternative is revealing as well, since he does not suggest that Alice ought to have deliberated differently, but instead should not have deliberated at all. Once they have recognized the importance of "truth and honesty," agents need not think very much about what to do with their lives more generally.

Now, as Kate Flint has noted, Trollope's portrayal of Alice undoubtedly reflects Victorian sexual politics.[382] Certainly, Trollope reveals a version of separate-spheres ideology in the suggestion that Alice's confusion arises from her belief that she should do something with her life besides "marrying and having two children."[383] The anti-feminist impulses inherent in the view become more obvious in the narrator's explanation that Alice has become confused after listening to a "flock of learned ladies" (140). As such, it is difficult not to see ideological content in Trollope's suggestion that Alice should not reflectively deliberate, but instead just feel and act. Nevertheless, the destabilization of rational judgment is philosophically insightful, and the depiction of Alice's irrationality points to an issue not constrained by Victorian assumptions about gender.

For instance, the narrator returns to the relationship between rationality and coherence in a series of counterfactuals:

> When she told herself that she would have no scope for action in that life in Cambridgeshire which Mr. Grey was preparing for her, she did not herself know what she meant by action. Had any one accused her of being afraid to separate herself from London society, she would have declared that she went very little into society and disliked that little. Had it been whispered to her that she loved the neighbourhood of the shops, she would have scorned the whisperer. Had it been suggested that the continued rattle of the big city was necessary to her happiness, she would have declared that she and her father had picked out for their residence the

[382] Kate Flint, "Trollope and Sexual Politics." In *Can You Forgive Her?,* by Anthony Trollope (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).
[383] The Victorian doctrine of the separate spheres is perhaps too commonly known to require citation, but a famous expressio of it n occurs in John Ruskin, *Of Queens' Gardens* (New York: Hearst's International Library Company, 1902).

> quietest street in London because she could not bear noise;—and yet she told herself that she feared to be taken into the desolate calmness of Cambridgeshire. (141)

The passage points out a tension between Alice's real reasons and the conclusions to which she has come. Alice does not like London society, London shops, or London noise, and each of these facts about her desires represents a reason to marry John Grey. But her desires are opaque to her in this matter: without being self-deceived, she has concluded that the "desolate calmness" of John Grey's estate in Cambridgeshire represents a reason not to marry him. This sort of disjunct between desires and agents' conclusions about them is what rational incoherence involves, and it is significant that the problem is that Alice had thought too much about them. In thinking about herself, she has distanced herself from the sort of immediate reaction feelings involve. As the narrator indicates, if one asks her directly whether she likes London, she says no—but she loses the clear connection to her desires when she moves to the larger question of whom she wants to marry.

Correspondingly, John persuades Alice to marry him through a critique of her reasoning:

> I think you have been foolish, misguided,—led away by a vain ambition, and that in the difficulty to which these thing brought you, you endeavored to constrain yourself to do an act, which, when it came near to you,—when the doing of it had to be more closely considered, you found to be contrary to your nature (769).

Alice's response is revealing:

> Now, as he spoke thus, she turned her eyes upon him, and looked at him, wondering that he should have had power to read her heart so accurately (769).

This diagnosis is consistent with what John thinks throughout the novel; elsewhere he thinks of Alice as "one wounded, and wanting a cure" and as brought to "a sad pass" by "her ill

judgment" (138; 395). He thus portrays Alice's conscious beliefs as a medical condition; a "vain ambition" has so misdirected her assessment of what she should do that it is comparable to a kind of insanity. Moreover, John points briefly but suggestively to a theory of rationality in discerning a part of Alice that resists this condition: he appeals to her "nature," suggesting that it was ultimately in some sense smarter than she was. When, to paraphrase his point, push came to shove and it was time to marry George Vavasor, Alice's unreflective nature found the action "contrary," and rose against her judgment. Alice confirms this psychological diagnosis in her reaction, and the plot does as well; tellingly, even after saying she would marry George, Alice involuntarily resists his embrace (380).

The appeal to Alice's "nature" as an entity that opposes her judgment has two important implications. First, it helps explain the tension between Alice's actions and her advice to Lady Glencora. As Juliet McMaster has observed, Alice "can be astonishingly sententious in her judgments on Glencora's behavior, and in the very matters in which she is herself most at fault": she is insistent that Glencora maintain her marriage vow, for instance, when of course Alice has broken her own promises a number of times.[384] This sort of hypocrisy is of course common; as McMaster puts it, "Most of us have at some time irritably responded to cavilers: 'Don't do what I do, do what I say!'" (613). Ordinarily, of course, such statements function to point out duplicity, noting that a moral agent is not living up to her ideals. But what Trollope suggests, through John Grey's diagnosis, is that they can also be indicative of ethical confusion. If in commonplace hypocrisy the problem is that agents need to bring what they do in line with what they say, in ethical confusion the problem is that agents need to bring what they say in line with what they do.

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[384] Juliet McMaster, "'The Meaning of Words and the Nature of Things': Trollope's *Can You Forgive Her?*" *Studies in English Literature* 14.4 (Autumn 1974): 603-618, 612.

Ted Hinchman calls this "upstream reasoning." In moments of "rational akrasia," where an agent acts rationally in acting against her best judgment, he argues that such agents should manifest what he calls what he calls "reasonable self-mistrust."[385] Maintaining a healthy skepticism about the limited capacity of one's rational abilities, such agents take their inability to perform the action they have judged they should do to be indicative of a reason that they have overlooked. As opposed to reasoning "downstream," where an agent forms a judgment and then acts, such agents thus reason "upstream": having found that they cannot act, they reform their judgment.

Second, the fact that Alice experiences the reason-responsiveness of her "nature" through her feelings suggests that agents' non-deliberative feelings can be better guides to their actual reasons than their deliberations are. In this light, it is significant that Alice's ethical confusion arose in part from a dismissal of her emotions: "it was not her love for [George] that prompted her to run so terrible a risk. Had it been so, I think that it would be easier to forgive her. She was beginning to think that love […] did not matter" (342). The positive reason for marrying George, the narrator explains, is surprisingly haphazard: "She had not so much asked herself why she should do this thing, as why she should not do it […] 'If I can do him good why should I not marry him?' In that feeling had been the chief argument which had induced [Alice] to return such an answer as she had sent to [George]" (373; 374). This dismissal of the importance of love is necessary, because Alice never denies that she loves John: "With all her doubts Alice never doubted her love for John Grey" (140). In concluding that it does "not matter" whether she loves George, Alice dismisses the reasons to which her love for John attends. Rather than trusting that her affection attends to genuinely valuable properties that she cannot consciously articulate—and not least, the fact

[385] Ted Hinchman, "Rational requirements and 'rational' akrasia," *Philosophical Studies* (2012): 1-24, 2. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

that loving someone is by itself a good reason for marrying him—she distrusts her own emotions.

In the suggestion that emotional reactions can be rational, and that Alice acts irrationally in dismissing them, Trollope speaks to an important trend in recent moral philosophy. As Karen Jones has described it, such feelings can significantly be "reason-trackers." She explains: "When an agent's emotional responses are shaped, fine-tuned, and sometimes even radically transformed through the process of character formation," they can become "reliable at latching on to the reasons that obtain for her.[386] The point here is that explanations of rationality need to account for those moments when an agent acts rationally without recognizing that she is doing so: when well-developed emotions respond to a fact and subsequently move an agent to act in the same way she would have if she recognized the fact and deliberated about it, the insistence that such deliberation is necessary for rational action seems implausible.[387] Indeed, the Duke of St. Bungay seems to be speaking for the author when he remarks, "I would a deal sooner trust to instinct than to calculation" (619).

Trollope returns to a similar kind of agent in *The Prime Minister*. Overtly the story of the Duke of Omnium's short ministry, the novel in fact devotes much of its time to the love affairs of Emily Wharton. In explaining why she made the mistake of marrying Ferdinand Lopez, who has turned out to be a vicious and amoral materialist with intentions of exploiting Emily's rich father, the narrator remarks:

> The whole man was so different from what she had thought him to be. Before their marriage no word as to money had ever reached her ears from his lips. He had talked

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[386] Karen Jones, "Emotion, Weakness of Will, and the Normative Conception of Agency." *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 52 (2003): 181-200, 196. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.
[387] The rich philosophical conversation responding to Arpaly's claims has been centered around this issue. See, for instance, Niko Kolodny, "Why be Rational?" *Mind* 114 (July 2005): 509-563 and Nomy Arpaly and Tim Schroeder, "Deliberation and Acting for Reasons," *Philosophical Review* 121.2 (2012): 209-239. I shall return to these questions in a moment.

> to her of books,—and especially of poetry. Shakespeare and Moliére, Dante and Goethe, had been or had seemed to be dear to him. And he had been full of fine ideas about women, and about men in their intercourse with women.[388]

At first, this passage suggests that Emily has been simply deceived. Ferdinand Lopez fooled her into thinking that he was a better—or at any rate, more romantic—man than he in fact turned out to be. As we learn at an earlier moment, "The man, certainly, was one strangely endowed with the power of creating a belief" (42). Unlike the self-deceived agents, therefore, it is not the case that Emily has temporarily become unaware of facts she would ordinarily have seen, or acted on the basis of "virtues" she would have ordinarily have recognized as vices; had Lopez not succeeded in deceiving her, she would not have acted as she did.

Yet the situation is more complicated than simple deception, for Emily's choice of her husband is also in some sense the result of a disagreement with her family about what is most important in selecting a husband. The narrator explains:

> [Emily] had once ventured to form a doctrine for herself, to preach to herself a sermon of her own, and to tell herself that this gift of gentle blood and of gentle nurture, of which her father thought so much […] was after all but a weak, spiritless quality […] As for that love of honest, courageous truth which her father was wont to attribute to it, she regarded his theory as based upon legends, as in earlier years was the theory of the courage, and constancy, and loyalty of the knights of those days. The beau ideal of a man which she then pictured to herself was graced, first with intelligence, then with affection, and lastly with ambition […] Such had been her theories as to men and their attributes, and acting on that, she had given herself and all her happiness into the keeping of Ferdinand Lopez. Now, there was gradually

[388] Anthony Trollope, *The Prime Minister* (New York: Penguin, 1994/1875-76): 382. Hereafter cited in the text.

> coming upon her a change in her convictions,—a change that was most unwelcome, that she strove to reject,—one which she would not acknowledge that she had adopted even while adopting it. But now,—ay, from the very hour of her marriage,—she had commenced to learn what it was that her father had meant when he spoke of the pleasure of living with gentlemen. (266)

The first point to note here is that it complicates our understanding of Emily's mistake: rather than just a straightforward example of Emily taking Lopez to be something that he in fact isn't, it is also a result of Emily's rejection of her father's conception of a good husband. And crucially, Emily's father is not deceived in one critical sense. Though Mr. Wharton fails to perceive Lopez' immorality generally and his near-bankrupt state specifically—and both mistakes on Mr. Wharton's part are the result of careful stratagems on Lopez'—he nevertheless does not see Lopez as a suitable match for his daughter. Thus, Emily's mistake cannot purely be the result of deception, but is also in some sense the product of the "doctrine" she upholds. And interestingly, there is a sense in which Emily is not really deceived at all: as she admits to herself, "The intelligence at any rate was there, and, in spite of his roughness, the affection which she craved. And the ambition, too, was there" (267). This moment makes it seem that Emily's mistake about Lopez' nature is in fact irrelevant, or at any rate secondary, to her mistake in conceiving of the nature of a good husband.

Much like Alice Vavasor's "vague idea" that there was something to do beyond getting married, then, Emily's irrationality arises from a systematic mistake in her judgment. Again, this reflects in part a troubling politics: Emily rejects her father's somewhat racist and classist view about the importance of "gentle blood and gentle nurture," thinking that there is "no reason why such a hero as her fancy created should be born of lords and ladies rather than of working mechanics, should be English rather than Spanish or French" (266). Given

the fact that Emily turns out to be deeply mistaken about Lopez's nature, it is difficult not to see Trollope as at least hinting on the importance of racial considerations for moral deliberation. But again, as with the depiction of Alice Vavasor, it is possible to discern real philosophical insight in Trollope's portrayal: in eliminating all racist and classist criteria, Emily has removed ethical evaluations from her deliberative process as well. Thus, I am inclined to think that Emily's mistake consists in her dismissal of the ethical facts her father's admittedly prejudiced concepts describe, rather than in the dismissal of the prejudices themselves. In short, Emily fails to properly value ethical criteria in choosing her husband.

The irrationality here emerges in the novel's description of how she came to form the doctrine. If *Can You Forgive Her?* showed Alice's irrationality by showing a conflict between her judgment and her stated reasons—she didn't want to live in London, but concluded she shouldn't marry John Grey because she didn't want to move to Cambridgeshire—*The Prime Minister* shows Emily's irrationality through a genealogy of Emily's beliefs about marriage. In explaining how Emily chose Lopez over her earlier lover Arhur Fletcher, the narrator reveals how Emily's beliefs reflect psychological manipulation rather than the assessment of reasons:

> She remembered [Arthur's] eager, boyish, honest entreaties to herself, which to her had been without that dignity of a superior being which a husband should possess. She became aware that she had thought the less of him because he had thought the more of her. She had worshipped this other man because he had assumed superiority and had told her that he was big enough to be her master. But now,—now that it was all too late,—the veil had fallen from her eyes. She could now see the difference between manliness and 'deportment.' Ah,—that she should ever have been so blind,

she who had given herself credit for seeing so much clearer than they who were her elders! (338).

Rather than fulfilling her idiosyncratic conception of a good husband, Lopez really drove Emily's judgment about whom to marry by mastering the power dynamics in their initial meetings. By assuming the superior position of the "master," Lopez won Emily's "worship"; the implication seems to be that Emily loves the power position rather than the person, and would have worshipped anyone who could have occupied it.

In recognizing this element of herself, Emily similarly recognizes the mistakes of her doctrine. Indeed, she sees it in terms of perceptual failure: she was temporarily "veiled" and "blind," and not in possession of her full powers of judgment, which—after her marriage—now allow her to correctly 'see' the difference between 'manliness' and 'deportment.' This blinded state, she implies, consists in the mistaken belief that a husband "ought to possess" the dignity of a "superior being," a belief that led to her reject Arthur Fletcher's advances. This state has been alluded to earlier: just before her marriage to Lopez, Emily meets with Arthur; afterwards, the narrator tells us "her mind would revert to all those choicest moments in her early years in which she had been happy with Arthur Fletcher; in which she had first learned to love him, and had then taught herself to understand by some *confused and perplexed lesson* that she did not love him as men and women love" (147, emphasis mine). In other words, she has let a mistaken set of considerations convince her that she did not have sufficient reason to marry Arthur

Arpaly terms the dramatic shift in judgment Emily experiences a "dawning." In such moments, an agent suddenly comes to recognize that her considered judgment does not reflect her real reasons. "As a result of long exposure to new evidence," Arpaly explains, "people change their mind, sans deliberation" ("Acting Rationally" 508). Ferdinand Lopez's

immoral financial manipulations have long troubled Emily, and she has had a particularly difficult time reconciling Lopez's rude treatment of Arthur with her conception of Lopez as a gentleman. After Lopez takes offense at one of Arthur's letters, the narrator explains: "She knew thoroughly well that there had been no grain of offence in that letter […] and she knew that no man, no true man, would have taken offence at it. She tried to quench her judgment, and to silence the verdict which her intellect gave against him, but her intellect was too strong even for her heart" (334). This fascinating moment, in a telling demonstration of the power of ethical confusion, shows Emily trying to deploy self-control *against* herself, in service of what is her current best judgment. However, the action will sit as a piece of evidence in Emily's mind, and eventually create the moment of dawning when the veil falls from her eyes and she recognizes Lopez as the scoundrel he is.

As with John Grey, moreover, Arthur is finally able to persuade Emily to marry him by critiquing her judgment:

> "After that you have no right to set yourself up to judge what may be best for my happiness. They who know how to judge are all united. Whatever you may have been, they believe that it will be good for me that you should now be my wife. […] Every friend you have wants you to marry the man you love and to put an end to the desolation which you have brought on yourself. There is not one among us all, Fletchers and Whartons, whose comfort does not more or less depend on your sacrificing the luxury of your own woe."
>
> "Luxury!"
>
> "Yes; luxury. No man ever had a right to say more positively to a woman that it was her duty to marry him, than I have to you. […] I say that it is your duty to give up drowning us all in tears, burying us in desolation" (683-84).

Arthur's harshness here depends upon an assertion of the sort of self-distrust Ted Hinchman suggested as the proper response to rational akrasia. Having experienced the failure of her own judgment, Arthur argues, Emily has no right to believe her judgment about him has any validity. Moreover he goes on to rudely critique her behavior: she has been in deep mourning since the death of Lopez, but Arthur diagnoses this expression of grief as a buried sort of pride. Against her belief that this is necessary, Arthur insists on his own judgment—and the judgment of "every friend" Emily has—that she should get remarried, to him, immediately. As with Alice Vavasor, moreover, Emily accepts this critique, acceding to Arthur's almost bullying request: in so doing, she validates his claim that her judgment was mistaken, and trusts the recalcitrant affection she has long admitted she feels for him (686).

* * *

In concluding that Trollope criticizes the view that moral deliberation should involve a process of reflective judgment, and that he advocates an instinctive version of moral agency, the arguments here align with the critical consensus about Trollope's moral philosophy. James Kincaid points out that "the most common standard for moral behavior in Trollope is the code centered on the word 'gentleman'" (12). While, as we saw, there is critical disagreement about just how substantive this code is, critics agree that it is not identifiable with a particular principle for action: one cannot be a gentleman by following a rule.[389] A degree of situational sensitivity, which one can model but not articulate, is required.

[389] Certainly, apRoberts emphasizes such a sensitivity in her notion of Trollope's "casuistry," but Shirley Robin Letwin captures a very similar idea: "The manners of a gentleman are not a set of choreographed movements and they cannot be found in a code or a manual." *The Gentleman in Trollope: Individuality and Moral Conduct* (Pleasantville: Akadine, 1982): 115. She explains further: "The excellence of a gentleman depends on the 'manner' in which he conducts himself. And his 'manner' consists in the kinds of considerations that he takes into account when deliberating and how he connects what he thinks and does here and now with what he has thought and done in the past" (89). In suggesting that a 'manner,' irreducible to heuristics, is central to what is admirable about the gentleman for Trollope, Letwin articulates what I take to be the critical consensus.

In so doing, Trollope differs substantively from the neo-Kantian tradition, and aligns himself with the Aristotelian or virtue ethics theory.[390] The all-important "style" of a gentleman, which includes his instinctive sense of which situational nuances are relevant and how to behave accordingly, represent a Victorian version of the deliberative sense Aristotle called "practical wisdom," and a clear alternative to the Kantian picture of deliberation through the categorical imperative.[391]

What the arguments here have contributed to this interpretation is a sense of Trollope's coherence. Rather than demonstrating his rejection of principle-based judgment by showing how it cannot properly evaluate the complexities of specific situations, this chapter has sought to show how Trollope questions the psychology of judgment itself. Through his diverse representations of irrationality, Trollope contends that the deliberative judgment of practical reasoning is easily misled into self-deception, that it can fail to motivate even when it is not biased by desire, and finally that even unbiased judgment can still be profoundly mistaken. Thus, Trollope offers a moral psychology that complements his view of moral deliberation: the gentleman represents an ideal for moral agency not only because he will be appropriately sensitive to situational particularities, but also because—in minimizing the ethical role of judgment—he will avoid irrationality. In making this suggestion, Trollope alters the Kantian strain of Victorian morality in a more thorough way than even the significant modifications of Eliot, Dickens, and Meredith. While these writers certainly recognize the existence of self-deception and the importance of situational sensitivity, Trollope's sustained critique of the traditional psychological assumptions about judgment goes significantly beyond these points, and thus rejects the moral psychology at the core of the Kantian account.

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[390] See Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 56-62.
[391] See *On Virtue Ethics*, 59; also *Love's Knowledge*, 66-72.

By way of conclusion, however, a slight qualification of my argument indicates a path for future analysis. On the basis of the arguments here, one might reasonably conclude that for Trollope reflective moral deliberation—susceptible as it is to self-deception, motivational gaps, and sheer error—is always a mistake, and that moral agents ought to aspire as much as possible to purely instinctive lives. But this would not be quite right: there are, importantly, scenes of sincere and admirable deliberation in Trollope, where agents make difficult decisions and act on them. Perhaps the most famous scene in this regard is Mr. Palliser's decision in *Can You Forgive Her?* to reject an opportunity to become the Chancellor of the Exchequer in order to try to save his marriage. Having learned that his wife is in love with Burgo Fitzgerald and not with him, he concludes that he must do everything in his power to try to make Glencora happy, even though this means he will miss the political opportunity he has wanted all of his life.

Trollope represents this decision, to my mind, entirely without irony: the narrator and the novel both seem to admire the Duke for his sacrifice, as do a number of the characters. Thus, it seems that deliberation can occasionally be rational in Trollope. In her recent work, Arpaly has emphasized the fact that deliberation is itself an action: in the same way that situational facts make ordinary actions reasonable—a falling piano makes it reasonable for me to move—so there might be situational facts that make careful reflective consideration of reasons a rational action to perform.[392] And this accords with the portrayal of ideal moral agency in some neo-Aristotelian thinkers, who suggest that virtuous people will indeed occasionally deliberate seriously and reflectively; it is just that they will only do so

[392] See Arpaly and Schroeder, "Deliberation and Acting for Reasons." They suggest that deliberation "is brought to bear as its own sort of action," made reasonable by facts to which an agent is sensitive without deliberating; in such moments, deliberation assists an agent's instinctive reason-responsiveness, rather than overwhelming it.

when the situation calls for it.[393] Having thus recognized in this chapter the many ways in which judgment can fail in Trollope's fiction, a complementary analysis, along the lines laid out above, might seek to find the moments in which it succeeds.

[393] In a famous essay, Rosalind Hursthouse described just such an instance; see "Virtue Ethics and Abortion." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 20.3 (Summer 1991): 223-246. As she suggests, even an agent who correctly concludes that she should have an abortion might do something wrong in failing to deliberate seriously about it: it is possible to be callous and not give the decision the weight it merits, even while otherwise acting correctly (237). In this way, deliberation is itself an action that is required.

The Challenge of Aesthetic Skepticism and the Importance of Being Profound

The analysis thus far has attempted to pair a certain kind of interpretation—one that seeks to draw out the intellectual content of literary works—with a methodology that explains and defends this style of close reading. Arguing in the preface that the juxtaposition of Kantian moral philosophy and the Victorian novel offers a particularly fruitful combination, I developed a hermeneutic model for "content formalism" in the introduction that emphasized reading for the ideas and in particular the moral philosophy in a text. That sort of reading turned out to involve a heavy use of present-day debates in theoretical ethics, as I drew on a range of contemporary philosophers to help interpret works from the past. Accordingly, the first interlude took some pains to defend this kind of "presentism," and in particular the importance of a balance between rational and historical reconstruction.

One might naturally assume that the upshot of this sort of reading was a philosophical claim: that the reason to bring works from the past into the present is that they have something important to tell us, something different from what we currently think. But as I indicated in the preface, that's not how I have envisioned the argument. While it seems possible that Trollope might have something to contribute to current debates about akrasia while Eliot offers a useful model of moral deliberation, the interpretations offered here have not attempted to demonstrate these claims. Nor would I hinge the value of the interpretations or the value of the works they consider on whether the philosophical positions they advocate in fact strike us now as the best way to address their respective

questions. Rather, the interpretations have attempted to show something rather broader, suggesting that the intellectual content of the literary texts gives them aesthetic value.

In the introduction, I suggested that this approach depends on a version of Wayne Booth's pluralism about aesthetic goods. As he puts it:

> The search [for universal standards] stacks narratives in a single pyramid, with all of the candidates competing for a spot at the apex. Such an assumption, when applied rigorously, will always damn a large share of the world's most valuable art. I propose that we think instead […] of a botanical garden full of many beautiful species, each species implicitly bearing standards of excellence within its kind. (*Company We Keep* 56)

The notion here is that it is a mistake to reduce our evaluations for art into a common denominator, since this will always eliminate—or at least fail to fit clearly—a number of works that are worthy at least of attention. Rather, there are many things that can make art good, and one ought to develop a critical vocabulary nuanced enough to capture that fact.

To take some steps towards that vocabulary, it seems to me that we have a word for intellectual positions which may or may not be true, but which nevertheless demonstrate insight and creativity in addressing problems of real import: they are "profound." Moreover, it is possible to borrow from moral philosophy a way of thinking about this kind of evaluation, one attuned to the sort of pluralism Booth recommends. Words like "profound" are "thick concepts": they combine evaluation and description in a single term.

Such concepts are central to Elizabeth Anscombe's famous 1958 essay, "Modern Moral Philosophy," where she argues in part that notions of moral "obligation" represent the residue of a "law conception of ethics" that is no longer widely acceptable.[394] In place of

[394] Elizabeth Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy." *Philosophy* 33.124 (January 1958): 1-15, 5. Further

this conception, she recommends a turn to more concrete ethical notions. She writes:

> I should judge that Hume and our present-day ethicists had done a considerable service by showing that no content could be found in the notion "morally ought"; if it were not that the latter philosophers try to find an alternative (very fishy) content and to retain the psychological force of the term. It would be most reasonable to drop it. It has no reasonable sense outside a law conception of ethics; they are not going to maintain such a conception; and you can do ethics without it, as is shown by the example of Aristotle. It would be a great improvement if, instead of "morally wrong," one always named a genus such as "untruthful," "unchaste," "unjust." We should no longer ask whether doing something was "wrong," passing directly from some description of an action to this notion; we should ask whether, e.g., it was unjust; and the answer would sometimes be clear at once. (7)

Anscombe's point here is deceptively simple. On the surface, the claim is historical: Anscombe is suggesting (somewhat controversially) that ideas about moral obligation, enshrined in words like "ought," represent the philosophical remnant of widespread belief in a divine legislator.[395] Thus, given that belief in such a legislator is no longer universal, we would be better off returning to Aristotelian ethics, which does not rely on such concepts.

But the point has more than historical significance, insofar as it meets a certain kind of skepticism about morality. In the latter half of the passage, Anscombe appears to be imagining someone who is suspicious of the possibility of truthful claims in ethics because of the difficulty of knowing whether any action is "morally wrong." If instead of asking about moral wrongness the agent asked about an action's fit with some more specific content,

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citations are included parenthetically in the text.

[395] See Roger Crisp's essay "Does Modern Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?" for an example of the way Anscombe's historical claims have been challenged. *Modern Moral Philosophy: Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement 54* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 75-93.

Anscombe argues, "the answer would sometimes be clear at once": in other words, one could address this particular kind of skepticism insofar as an action would be clearly "unjust" when it might not be immediately clear whether it was wrong. And certainly this fits with my arguments here: I am not sure whether *Middlemarch* is aesthetically valuable, but I am reasonably sure that it is profound.

This way of thinking about conceptual terms derives originally from the anthropological work of Clifford Geertz, who—citing Gilbert Ryle—distinguished between "thick" and "thin" descriptions of a culture.[396] Thin descriptions of an event capture the physical movements of those participating, but thick descriptions move past this into an understanding of the intentions behind them, rendering them intelligible. As Geertz puts it, "Culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly—that is, thickly—described."

Bernard Williams famously drew on these terms in moral philosophy, noting the "important distinction" between "statements deploying what I call *thin* ethical concepts and statements deploying what I call *thick* ethical concepts."[397] He goes on to explain the distinction thus:

> Thin ethical concepts are concepts like 'good', 'right', and 'wrong'. 'Abortion is wrong,' if anybody makes so unqualified a claim, is an ethical statement that deploys a thin, in fact the thinnest, ethical concept. Contrast with this ethical statements deploying concepts such as 'cruel,' 'brutal,' 'dishonest,' 'treacherous,' or which

[396] Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973): 3-30.
[397] Bernard Williams, "Truth in Ethics." *Ratio* 8.3 (December 1995): 227-242. Further citations included parenthetically in the text. Such concepts are central to Williams's landmark *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986); see especially chapters eight and nine.

describe people as chaste, kind-hearted, or whatever. Such statements, in my terms, deploy thick ethical concepts. (234-35)

There is a complex literature about how, precisely, such concepts combine description and evaluation; the temptation is to say that the two are relatively separate—a word like "cruel" identifies a certain set of actions through non-evaluative criteria and then tags them with a negative evaluation.[398] However, there are powerful arguments against this view, which argue that the evaluations go, so to speak, all the way down: as Jonathan Dancy puts it, an object must have the features the concept identifies "in the right way" for it to count as an instantiation of the concept.[399] Fortunately, the distinction is not essential for our purposes here. What matters is the richness such concepts offer for the evaluative stance.

Thick concepts have played a much less significant role in theoretical aesthetics, though I am certainly not the first to emphasize the connection. The touchstone for such discussions is Frank Sibley's 1959 essay "Aesthetic Concepts." While Sibley's discussion predates Geertz's and Williams's—it is contemporaneous with Anscombe's—and thus does not benefit from many of their insights, nevertheless his central project of explicating the relationship in such concepts between "aesthetic features" and "non-aesthetic features" captures a key element of the debate.[400] Later discussions include the work of Nick Zangwill and Roman Bonzon, among others; Bonzon's recognition of the impossibility of separating the evaluative and descriptive—"Correct application of such concepts require […] a like-mindedness and like-heartedness with [their users]; the concepts simply are not accessible from the outside"—points towards the benefit of the debate about thick concepts in ethics

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[398] See the useful discussion from Allan Gibbard and Simon Blackburn in "Morality and Thick Concepts" for an example of and introduction to this literature. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 66 (1992): 267-299.
[399] Jonathan Dancy, "In Defense of Thick Concepts." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 20 (1995): 263-279, 276.
[400] Frank Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts." *The Philosophical Review* 68.4 (October 1959): 421-450, 424. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

for their use in aesthetics.[401] And writers in ethical theory often use aesthetic examples; David Wiggins's discussion of humor is one such instance that is particularly illustrative for how thick concepts might work in aesthetic interpretation.

In "A Sensible Subjectivism," Wiggins writes: "Amusement for instance is a reaction we have to characterize by reference to its proper object, via something perceived as funny (or incongruous or comical or whatever). There is no object-independent and property-independent, 'purely phenomenological' or 'purely introspective' account of amusement."[402] Wiggins's point here is that the feeling of amusement cannot be defined independently of either the feeling or the object that inspires it: we cannot say what the word "funny" means without reference to the kinds of things that inspire it, nor (perhaps obviously) without an explanation of the subjective nature of the reaction. But this does not mean that conversation and debate about the issue is useless: "We can do a little better than saying that the funny is that which makes people laugh" (149). More substantially, "When we dispute whether *x* is really funny, there is a whole wealth of considerations and explanations we can adduce, and by no means all of them have to be given in terms simply synonymous or interdefinable with 'funny'" (149). The point here is that the application of a thick concept involves a sensitivity to facts about an object, and those facts and their connections to the thick evaluative concept can be the subject of explication and debate.

It seems to me that humor offers a particularly clear example of how this works, and thus gives a useful analogy to the "profound." Take, for instance, Oscar Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and in particular Lady Bracknell's remark: "To lose one parent, Mr.

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[401] Roman Bonzon, "Fiction and Value." In *Imagination, Philosophy, and the Arts*, ed. Matthew Kieran and Dominic McIver Lopes (New York: Routledge, 2003). Nick Zangwill has written about thick concepts in aesthetics in a number of places; given the general nature of my discussion here, perhaps most important would be his informative entry on "Aesthetic Judgment" for the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
[402] David Wiggins, "A Sensible Subjectivism." In *Foundations of Ethics: An Anthology* (New York: Blackwell, 2007): 145-156, 149. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness."[403] One reason the line is funny is its surprising comparison of two different definitions of the word "loss": Wilde brings together the loss of tragedy with losses caused by everyday forgetfulness. Now, this condition is not sufficient for humor. Not all combinations of two different senses of a word's meaning in a single sentence are funny, and picking up which combinations are in fact funny inescapably involves evaluative norms. Nor is the condition necessary, as there are certainly other ways to be witty. But it is never the less a real explanation, insofar as it does not simply repeat the word "funny" but instead describes some of the features that combine to produce its humor. What is more, this concept plays a real and obvious role in aesthetic deliberation. If someone asks if she should read *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the response "yes, it's funny" is reasonable and meaningful. Because "humor" is a thick evaluative concept, the fact that a text is humorous provides, all by itself, a reason to read it.

A pluralist aesthetics through thick concepts sits in a sort of tense middle between two major strains of thinking about the value of art in current literary criticism. On the one hand, a lengthy tradition, inherited from the critiques of the canon in the 1980s, insists that the notion of aesthetic autonomy is a pernicious myth, and that the broader discourse of aesthetics is demonstrative of an ideology that is best understood as a mystification of certain power structures. In Isobel Armstrong's summary of the position, the aesthetic represents "the last bastion of the private self hubristically conceived as omnipotent creator."[404] On the other hand, the "New Formalists" seek to resurrect the importance of

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[403] Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest and Other Plays*, ed. Peter Raby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008): 266, I. 524. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

[404] See Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991). Isobel Armstrong, *The Radical Aesthetic* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 46. Further citations included parenthetically in the text. I am indebted to Armstrong's scholarship here, which organizes and closely discusses a number of the most serious recent challenges to the notion of the aesthetic.

attention to literary form: as Marjorie Levinson has summarized the movement, such critics share a commitment to the "aesthetic" as a means of fending "off the divisiveness encouraged by the kinds of cognitive, ethical, and juridical commitments […] rife among and effectively defining all the critical practices summed up by the term new historicism" (11[405]). Pluralist aesthetics shares with the former movement a rejection of the notion of aesthetic autonomy, insofar as it relies on evaluative terms that certainly have meaning outside the aesthetic realm; however, it denies that such terms are reducible to their ideological effect. It shares this rejection of the ideological reduction of the aesthetic with the New Formalists, but—particularly in deploying the content formalism I've advocated here—it denies their impulse to claim that literary form is the element of literature essentially worthy of attention.

The issues involved in the tension between these two strains are far too substantive to discuss, even in cursory fashion, in this conclusion, but I think I do see a way in which thick concepts can help overcome one of the arguments that led to skepticism about the value of art in the first place. The argument I want to interrogate parallels the argument Anscombe was resisting, and works roughly as follows. Critics begin by identifying the formal features some tradition supposes to be the source of aesthetic value. They then point out the contingent nature of the relation between those features and value, asking why those features in particular merit such status and why some other features do not. Barbara Herrnstein Smith offers a particularly reflective version of this argument:

> "Aesthetic" comes to be roughly equivalent to "relating certain cognitive/sensory experiences, these being the ones elicited by objects that have certain formal properties, the being the ones that identify objects as artworks, these being the kinds

[405] Levinson, Marjorie. "What is New Formalism?" *PMLA* 122.2 (March 2007): 558-569; she borrows the term "New Formalism" itself from Susan Wolfson. I will be considering the longer version of this article, made available at http://sitemaker.umich.edu/pmla_article/home. As with Guillory and Armstrong, I am indebted to Levinson's scholarship.

> of works that elicit certain cognitive/sensory experiences, these being…" and so forth around again. […] Since the core examples cited will always be drawn from the Western academic canon […] it is no surprise that "essentially aesthetic experiences" and "essential aesthetic value" always turn out to be located in all the old familiar places and masterpieces.[406]

Smith's point here is that the traditional definitions of the aesthetic are fundamentally and viciously circular: one derives the standard definitions of aesthetic feelings and "formal properties" from the experience of reading certain works that one knows to be of aesthetic value, but it turns out that the only support given for the claim that these texts have aesthetic value is the fact that they have the formal features standardly defined as "aesthetic." Since the only criterion for the formal features derives from the set of standard works and the only criterion for the set of works is the set of standard formal features, the argument is circular. And, as she implies with the phrase "Western academic canon," this circularity gives rise to the suspicion that the real criteria for the selection of canonical works are political, and that cultural objects become "aesthetically valuable" just insofar as they are useful tools for social manipulation by some dominant class.[407]

What is important to note about this argument is that it depends on the logical gap between formal properties and aesthetic value. In other words, it is because of the need for an independent criterion of value—that is, a criterion other than the list of works—that the aesthetic value of some formal property comes into question. Herrnstein-Smith does not

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[406] Barbara Herrnstein-Smith, *Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988): 35. Further citations included parenthetically in the text.

[407] I take Jane Tompkins's work to be an example of this strategy in practice. As she puts it, "Instead of asking whether a work is unified or discontinuous, subtle, complex, or profound, one wants to know first, whether it was successful in achieving its aims; and second, whether its aims were good or bad"; this argument works to revalue female writers like Harriet Beecher Stow vis a vis the traditional writers of the American Renaissance—Melville, Hawthorne, and others. *Sensational Designs. Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), xvii. I am guided to this passage by John Guillory, *Cultural Capital* 24.

entertain here the possibility that the proper identification of a formal property might support *itself* as valuable, and thus offer on its own an independent criterion for picking out valuable texts. But this is precisely the significance of concepts like the "profound": to show that a text is profound just is to show that it is valuable. No further argument demonstrating the value of being profound is necessary; to suggest that a text's profundity is not a worthwhile characteristic—as opposed to disputing that it is actually profound—is just to reveal confusion about what the word "profound" means.

It is important to see that that the ability of thick concepts to avoid circularity stems from their specificity and density in combining evaluation and description. As opposed to aesthetic terms that merely praise the work—for instance, "beautiful"—thick concepts specify the features of the artwork to which they appeal, and thus a dispute about artistic value can appeal to facts about the properties of the text. Yet in including evaluative content, they avoid the parallel emptiness of terms that merely describe the formal properties of a text: the fact that a text is "tragic," after all, does not obviously prove that it is valuable.

Accordingly, one need not appeal to the bare notion of "aesthetic value," and thus there is no reason to start down the circular logic Herrnstein-Smith traces. One could of course re-define "aesthetic value" to mean just the evaluative content in the thick concepts, but it's important to keep in mind that "value" is not in this case the ontologically separate and metaphysically dubious entity Herrnstein-Smith rejects—in this redefinition, it is just another word for the fact that a text's humor offers a reason to engage it.[408] Something

[408] Herrnstein-Smith is deeply critical of what she calls "axiologic logic," which tends in her view toward strong metaphysical claims. As she puts it at one point, "Two linked notions of are central to the account of tastes in traditional aesthetic axiology: first, the idea that certain objects or forms please us 'naturally' by virtue of certain human universals; and second,, the belief that a *norm* and thus 'standard of correct and defective taste can be derived accordingly" (37).

similar is true about the claim that reading the text produces pleasure or happiness. Though one could say a great deal more about this issue, on the view I am gesturing at here, pleasure is not something over and above the experience of humor, such that humor "causes" or "creates" pleasure. Pleasure is just a less concrete and more abstract way of speaking about experiences like that of humor.[409] Moreover, the concept of the profound works in just this way: *The Egoist*'s profundity gives us a reason to read it, without a necessary appeal to any further notion of value or happiness.

Now, the value of this argument is dependent on it being the case that the word "profound" actually is more substantive than just the concept "aesthetically valuable," offering a genuinely independent criterion. And in one sense, this is going to be difficult to show: as with all thick concepts—honesty, courage, humor, etc.—necessary and sufficient conditions of application are impossible to come by. It seems to me we can nevertheless give a reasonably clear definition of what it means to be profound. Certain intellectual problems have been with us for a long time: questions of freedom, obligation, the meaning of life, and so forth remain issues of perennial—without being eternal—concern. Let us call such problems "important," with the recognition that which problems are important will change over time. In addressing such problems, texts will vary with respect to several attributes: creativity, in the form of innovative ways of thinking about the problem; thoughtfulness, in recognizing the many dimensions and nuances of the issue involved; elegance and coherence, in systematizing an approach in a clear form; and freedom from error, in avoiding (or not avoiding) obvious problems with a given approach. While it is

[409] This argument is perhaps closer to Herrnstein-Smith's overall positive view than my initial disagreement with part of her argument suggests. While she would be deeply suspicious of my notion that norms in aesthetic evaluation are possible, she's also deeply critical of what she calls the "Egalitarian Fallacy"—the idea that because no evaluative judgments are objectively valuable, they are all equally good. So it may be that aesthetics by thick aesthetic concepts is in fact a refined version of Herrnstein-Smith's view, rather than an oppositional alternative to it.

impossible to weigh these scales against each other, it seems reasonable to say that a creative, thoughtful, elegant, and largely if not completely persuasive approach to an important problem is profound.

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For the last ten years or so, when friends and family ask me what my favorite book is, my answers have been, in some order, *Middlemarch* and *Moby-Dick*. The most common response from friends outside the academy is usually some sort of a shrug and a remark that they could never get through it. Generally speaking, we then change topics, but if I could give a fuller response what I would say is that I frankly have a tough time getting through these books too. I believe that there are some readers for whom reading Eliot and Melville is as easy as reading the newspaper is for me (Quentin Skinner, on the basis of the copiousness of his footnotes, seems to digest difficult writing with ease), but I am not that reader.

But they're still my favorites, and that's because what I really like is thinking about them—better, thinking with them. It's not that I'm so taken by the interpretive puzzles of the text that I have to resolve them, but rather that Eliot and Melville seem to be telling me something—something interesting, important, and profound. That experience isn't substantially different from the experience of reading philosophy; in fact, it's the same experience. Ideas are exciting, and texts that convey that excitement are rewarding regardless of their genre.

This project has been about practicing a kind of criticism that's responsive to my experience, and developing and defending a theory of interpretation that licenses it. While I hope to have taken some steps in the necessary directions, I can see ways in which my arguments would need to be extended for the theory to be fully convincing. In my theoretical arguments, I focused on the questions of interpretation content formalism

produced, since they mattered more for the criticism I was practicing, but this left the aesthetic claims unaddressed until this conclusion. And one would to know more about them. What are the other thick aesthetic concepts, for instance? How do we reconcile the desire to take such concepts as valid with the recognition that they stem from a particular time, place, and social status?[410] As for the interpretive claims, one might reasonably point out that I have limited myself not merely to the nineteenth-century novel, but to a very small group of authors and formal structures within this range. Similarly, I've limited the broad category of reading for intellectual content to claims in moral philosophy. It's thus not clear how generalizable the interpretive models I've offered are: even other forms of fiction, much less poetry, involve intellectual content in ways different from those I've identified here. One would wonder correspondingly about discourses besides ethics; it's not clear that the techniques and justifications for understanding moral philosophy in fiction, which depend heavily on the embodiment of moral psychology in literary characters, work for other kinds of ideas.

Most generally, one might question my scholarship. As Julie Klein has noted, one of the real worries about interdisciplinary research is the difficulty of mastering any one field's practices: in attempting to work within many disciplines, the interdisciplinary scholar ends up working successfully in none (*Interdisciplinarity* 88). This project, which sought to combine intellectual history, literary criticism, and moral philosophy in its chapters, while drawing on literary and interpretive theory and the philosophy of art in its theoretical portions, certainly

[410] The point is easy to see with thick ethical concepts: to borrow Bernard Williams's example, the notion of "chastity" or "chasteness" as a virtue is one contemporary moral agents are not particularly inclined to accept as meaningful. See A.W. Moore's commentary at the end of *Ethics and the Limists of Philosophy*, 217. Williams himself takes up the example in "Truth in Ethics," 218. He offers another example that fits the current discussion more closely: "There was a marvelous moment in one of Oscar Wilde's trials when counsel read to Wilde a passage from one of his works and asked 'Mr. Wilde, don't you think that's obscene?' Wilde replied, "Obscene' is not a word of mine'" (237). The point, of course, is that Wilde wasn't disputing whether his actions were obscene, but rather the validity of the thick concept entirely.

left me with a greater appreciate of Klein's worry. Every corner I turned seemd to lead to a completely new field of scholarship that I needed to engage. It's not for me to say whether I've met the challenge the ambition of the project imposed, but I certainly felt the need to do so.

This said, I remain convinced that some version of this approach must be correct. That's not because I'm so persuaded by my own arguments, but rather because I trust my experience of reading Eliot, Melville, and the other novelists I've considered here. I wanted to talk about the novels in a way that would capture why someone might want to read them, and I still think that this is a worthwhile goal for literary criticism.

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Curriculum Vita

Born on June 30, 1982 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Patrick Fessenbecker's interest in the relationship between philosophy and literature stems most directly from his reading of *Moby-Dick* in his final year of high school, an experience that drove him to pursue the interdisciplinary humanitites in college. He completed bachelor's degrees in philosophy and English at East Tennesse State University, graduating in 2004 with an undergraduate thesis on competing philosophical definitions of poetry, with particular attention to the work of Martin Heidegger. He pursued a master's degree in philosophy at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, in hopes of further developing his philosophical background before returning to English. Completing his degree in 2007, he wrote a master's thesis on E.M. Forster and G.E. Moore, seeking to explore on the one hand the peculiarly powerful social effects of Moore's *Principia Ethica* on the largely non-philosophical readers of the Bloomsbury Group, and on the other hand Forster's exploration of a form of irrationality his novels term a "muddle." Patrick entered the Ph.D. program in English at Johns Hopkins in the fall of 2007. He completed oral exams in January of 2010, covering the fields of nineteenth-century British literature and American literature, and subsequently commenced work on this project.